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THE JEWS IN MEXICO: A HISTORY
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE PERIOD FROM 1857 TO 1930

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PREFACE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I INDEPENDENCE THROUGH THE RESTORED REPUBLIC: 1821 to 1876	11
CHAPTER II THE EARLY YEARS OF THE PORFIRIATO: 1877 to 1899	45
CHAPTER III THE LAST DECADE UNDER PORFIRIO DIAZ: 1900 to 1910	93
CHAPTER IV THE OUTBREAK OF REVOLUTION TO THE CONSTITUTION OF 1917	136
CHAPTER V JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO MEXICO AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN COMMUNITY. . .	155
CHAPTER VI ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS IN THE LITERA- TURE AND PRESS OF MEXICO: 1849 to 1910.	189
CHAPTER VII MEXICO - ANOTHER PROMISED LAND? A REVIEW OF PROJECTS FOR JEWISH COLONI- ZATION IN MEXICO: 1881 to 1925	238
CONCLUSION	288
APPENDIX	309
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY	322

INTRODUCTION

Wherever men have traveled on this globe, there have usually been Jews among them. For a long time, however, Mexico was considered an exception. This essay shall demonstrate that there has been Jewish life in Mexico since the Spanish conquest, and that between independence and the Revolution of 1910 a Jewish community slowly developed in Mexico City.

To justify the selection of this topic it is necessary to explain that according to the accepted history of the Jewish community in Mexico, its beginnings date from the post World War I immigration of Jews from Russia and Poland, and to a lesser extent, from the former Turkish Empire. This essay proposes to demonstrate the following:

1. Jews have lived in Mexico since the Spanish conquest.
2. Jewish immigrants have been coming to Mexico since that nation's independence was achieved in 1821. They came as businessmen, adventurers, and soldiers, and continued to come up to and including the years of social revolution.
3. At least a portion of these immigrants did participate in some form of Jewish community life.
4. The immigration of the Jews to Mexico, their limited numbers, and their pattern of life was closely related to Mexican historical events, philosophical currents, and popular attitudes.

5. During the last decade of the Porfiriato (1900-1910), an active Jewish community was openly established in Mexico City which acted as the core group, providing leadership and aid to the new immigrants who arrived in Mexico between 1921 and 1930. Thus, the Porfirian community should be considered the early stage of the modern Jewish community of Mexico.

That Jewish people have lived in Mexico since the days of Cortés has long been established. The indisputable evidence is provided by the Spanish themselves for El Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en México (The Court of the Holy Office of the Inquisition) kept detailed records of every accusation, trial, and sentence of accused Judaizers. Although a separate branch of the Holy Office was not established in New Spain until 1571, "Franciscans, Dominicans, and bishops under their episcopal powers had been exercising inquisitorial functions since 1523."¹ The Ramo de la Inquisición of the Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana is composed of thousands of original documents which record every word and action, as well as the names and origin of each suspect. After Mexican independence was achieved in 1821, Mexican liberal writers found the tragic victims of the

¹ Seymour B. Liebman, Guide to Jewish References in the Mexican Colonial Era: 1521-1821 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1964), p. 9.

Inquisition subject matter for articles, novels, and polemics.² Vicente Riva Palacio published a part of the proceso of the Carvajal family in El libro rojo in 1867, and Alfonso Toro published a two volume record of the proceedings in La Familia Carvajal in 1944. The first attempt to synthesize the records of individual procesos into a description of the life of the Jews in New Spain (as well as the Moorish and autochthonous deviates from Roman Catholicism) was made by Julio Jimenéz Rueda in Herejías y supersticiones en la Nueva España which was published in 1946. A recently published work by Seymour B. Liebman is the first book length social history of the Jews in colonial Mexico.³ Mr. Liebman makes full use of earlier published works on the subject as well as archival material in the Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana and the Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid. The Jews in New Spain is a valuable preface to this essay as a guide to understanding the heritage left by three centuries of secret faith and fear of the Holy Office.

As Mr. Liebman has often written, the Jews of New Spain are not the ancestors of the Jews who live in Mexico today. By the time of independence most of the crypto-Jews

² Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana: El pueblo judío en el pasado y el presente (México: Editorial de la Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, 1950), VII, 427-431. These pages include a summary of references to Jews in New Spain found in nineteenth century Mexican literature. José de J. Núñez y Domínguez in "Los judíos en la historia y literatura mexicana," Judaica Tomo 19 (Buenos Aires, 1945) discusses the topic more fully.

³ The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame and the Inquisition (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970).

were Catholic in belief as well as in outward practice, although many of them preserved certain empty rituals, such as lighting candles on Friday evenings, simply because their mothers had so taught them. Many also preserved Jewish ceremonial objects and a few Hebrew books as family heirlooms. Unlike Europe, where Jewish schools and devout spiritual leaders competed with the liberal and secular thought of the eighteenth century for the allegiance of the young, in Mexico, "outside the intellectual stream, (Jews) had no philosophic defenses, and thus walls upholding empty blind tradition, crumbled."⁴

The modern community of Jews in Mexico has a population variously estimated at between 32,000 and 50,000 members.⁵ Most of the Jews in Mexico are of the first or second generation, people who emigrated to Mexico from eastern Europe or the defunct Turkish Empire and their children. The current literature regarding the Jewish community in Mexico supports the statement made by Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso, Texas in 1923 that "The Jew who came to Mexico in the nineteenth

⁴ Liebman, The Jews in New Spain, p. 300.

⁵ Chaim Lazdeiski, Executive Director of the Comité Central Israelita de México, in a letter to the author dated March 24, 1970, estimates the Jewish population of Mexico in 1960 at 32,000. Dr. Albino Zertuche, Director of Statistics, Republic of Mexico, estimates 40,000; Menachem W. Leval of the Israeli Embassy in Mexico estimates 50,000. The latter two estimates are cited by Dr. Martin M. Weitz, "Indian Jews of Mexico," (Syosset, Long Island, 1965), mimeographed, in American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

century did not make his religious affiliation known, did not seek the fellowship of other Jews, and left no impression upon the story of the Jew in Mexico."⁶ Articles by Eduardo Weinfeld, Solomon Kahan, Tovy Meisel, and Seymour Liebman on the modern community in Mexico, as well as articles written during the period of immigration in the 1920's, barely mention the Jews who lived in Mexico before 1920.⁷ There are a very few exceptions, however, such as Rafael Heliodoro Valle who published an article in 1936 which includes the nineteenth and the early twentieth century as an integral part of the history of the Jews in Mexico.⁸ Valle also published a sympathetic account of the Jecker brothers in Mexico, probably unique in the absence of invective against the Swiss banker who is sometimes blamed for the French intervention.⁹ In 1962 Jacobo Glantz, a poet and scholar who came to Mexico from eastern Europe in the 1920's, gave recognition to those Jews who lived in Mexico before the large-scale immigration. He investigated the records

⁶ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, XXXIII (Cape May, N.J., 1923), 439.

⁷ See Bibliography.

⁸ "Judíos en México," Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía, Tomo 81 (Santiago de Chile, 1936), pp. 215-236.

⁹ "La tragedia de los hermanos Jecker," Revista de Revistas (Mexico), January 28, 1934, pages unnumbered.

of the Damascus congregation in Mexico City and reported the names of several earlier immigrants who had participated in a formal congregation in 1912.¹⁰

The published literature about the Jews of the colonial period and about the modern immigration and the community today presents a rather clear picture of the history of Mexican Jewry from 1521 to 1821 and from 1920 to the present. Aside from a few references to isolated individuals in the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, this period in the history of Mexican Jewry is neglected. It is to fill this gap that the present work is dedicated.

The story of the Jews in Mexico in the hundred year period between independence and the immigration of thousands of eastern European Jews into Mexico is naturally closely related to the historical development of the Mexican nation. In this essay the story of the Jews in Mexico will serve to illustrate characteristics unique to the history of Mexico. In particular, the philosophic change from the liberalism of the Reforma to the positivism of the Porfiriato and the subsequent decline of positivism in favor of a new and nationalistic liberalism will be developed. The major emphasis will

¹⁰ Jacobo Glantz, "Notes sobre la formación de la comunidad Judía de México," in Israel y la diáspora en el año 5721 (1960-1961), ed. Dr. Enrique Chemilsky (México: Kehila Ashkenazi de México, Departamento de la Segunda Generación, 1962), pp. 318-319.

be on the period from 1877 to 1910 which was dominated by the figure of the "great if not good" dictator, Porfirio Díaz.¹¹

This study shall present information about Jews who lived in Mexico between 1840 and 1920. Based on the evidence which the writer has gathered, an interpretation of the history of the Jews in independent Mexico is made. This study does not pretend to be definitive; nor is the story complete. Rather it is the beginning of what the writer hopes will be a series of articles that gradually will make possible a more complete understanding of the life of this particular minority group in Mexico. In truth, the task is great for one person. In Mexico at the present time, preliminary suggestions have been made for a joint project which would utilize the talents and energies of several scholars in an effort to produce a history of the Jews in Mexico.

Limitations of time, of sources, and of personal contacts in Mexico indicate the incomplete nature of the present work. On the other hand, owing to the fact that so little has been published on the subject, the author believes that there is value even in a limited attempt to present an account of Jewish life in independent Mexico.

The organization of this study is partly chronological and partly topical. The first five chapters constitute a chronological history of events, and attempt to relate the

¹¹ The phrase describing President Díaz was used in an unsigned article, "Joseph Fels, His Work for the I.R.O." Menorah Journal, VI (New York, August 1920), 199.

story of the Jewish people in Mexico with the larger history of the Mexican nation. It is to be hoped that these chapters, admittedly but a beginning, will provide clues which others may follow to a more complete history of the Jews in independent Mexico.

The attitudes of Mexicans toward Jews certainly must have influenced the pattern of life of the Jewish people in that country. Chapter VI examines the gradual change in attitudes as expressed in the intellectual journals and literature and in the popular press published in Mexico from 1840 to 1910. Liberals in Mexico found the Inquisition a convenient indictment of Spain and from independence through 1890 reference to the victims of the Holy Office were made, not as an indication of interest in the Jewish past, but as a political weapon with which to attack the conservative clerical party.

In 1867 a German scholar, Oloardo Hassey, whose influence among the young Mexican liberals was considerable, published a Hebrew grammar in Mexico.¹² Not until 1891, however, did any Mexican scholar express genuine interest in the history or culture of the Jewish people. The work of Dr. Jesús Díaz de León "without a doubt, meant more than the work of any other individual" in introducing Hebrew culture in Mexico.¹³

¹² Diccionario Porrúa de historia, biografía, y geografía de México (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1964), p. 671

¹³ Valle, "Judíos en México," Revista Chilena, p. 232.

Jesús Díaz de León represented the turning point in the attitude of intellectual Mexico toward the Jewish past and Jewish culture. Since his publications, several other Mexican scholars have deemed the Jewish heritage as worthy of study for itself and without political implication.

References to Jews in the Mexican press reflect the change in attitude from polemics, which paralleled the early literature, to accounts which picture the Jew as strange and exotic to a realistic acceptance that Jewish people living and working in Mexico constitute a community not very different from any other foreign community in the country.

The final chapter of this essay summarizes the various projects for Jewish colonization in Mexico in the period from 1880 to 1925. Proposals of colonization were directly related to the mass emigration of Jews from Russia and the effort to find places, aside from the United States, where these refugees could find religious freedom, political protection, and economic security. No Jewish colony was ever established in Mexico, and this last chapter attempts to offer an explanation. The pessimistic evaluations which Jewish agencies consistently made over a forty-five year period, in regard to Mexico as a prospective home for Jews, suggest that at least in the period under study the economy of Mexico and the ancient hatreds and superstitions of a deeply Catholic people were effective obstacles to large-scale immigration and colonization in Mexico.

For those Jews who did come to Mexico, life was not very different from life for settlers from other foreign countries. The pattern of life of the foreigner in Mexico was shaped not only by his own background, but by life and thought in Mexico. Thus, the study of the foreigner in Mexico should provide not only information about the foreigner, but also about the country in which he has made his home. A German sociologist, Gerhard Schmidt, has suggested that the Jews are the classic minority group and thus the most suitable model for the study of minority groups in any country. "The problem of the foreigner can be studied best through the history of the Jews which is the history of a race of foreigners," wrote Schmidt.¹⁴ "Since the Jews have no fatherland, their history is concentrated on emigration, and as a result demonstrates on a greater scale the same tendencies that are found in the history of emigrants from other nations."¹⁵

It is to be hoped that this study will illustrate the life of a minority group in Mexico and will also contribute toward an understanding of the developing Mexican nation.

¹⁴ "Los extranjeros," trans. Angela Muller Montiel, Revista Mexicana de Sociología, VIII (1946), 320.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 345, n. 14.

CHAPTER I

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH THE RESTORED REPUBLIC: 1821 TO 1876

From the moment that the sailors on the ship, *Pinta*, first sighted the land of the New World in 1492, Jews were a part of the exploration and settlement of Spanish America. They were there despite the fact that the discovery and exploration were sponsored by the Catholic kings, and settlement was officially restricted to pure Catholics whose faith was above reproach. Newly converted Christians were expressly forbidden entry to the new Spanish dominions.¹

The interpreter who accompanied Columbus was a newly baptized Christian, and Jews participated with Cortés in the conquest of Mexico twenty-seven years later. Two of these conquistadores, Hernando Alonso, whom Cortés rewarded with an encomienda, and González de Morales were prosecuted for Judaizing by the Holy Tribunal and burned at the stake in 1528.²

That Alonso and Morales were the first of thousands of crypto-Jews commonly known as *marranos* is evidenced by the fifteen hundred volumes of official records of the

¹ "Royal Instructions to Governor Ovando, 1501," in The Spanish Tradition in America, ed. Charles Gibson (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 57. Also, "Decree of Emperor Charles V, Sept. 15, 1522," cited by Seymour B. Liebman in Guide to Jewish References in the Mexican Colonial Era: 1521 - 1821 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), p. 10.

² Seymour B. Liebman, "Hernando Alonso: The First Jew on the North American Continent," Journal of Inter-American Studies, V (1963), 291, and also "Los Judíos en la historia de México," Cuadernos Americanos, XXVI (January-February, 1967), 145.

Inquisition (Ramo de la Inquisición) housed in the National Archive of the Mexican Nation. The Jews of New Spain were all baptized Catholics. Of these New Christian families, many must have fervently embraced the Roman Catholic religion. Others did not, especially those Portuguese Jews who underwent a forced mass baptism in the year 1507.³

It was customary among the crypto-Jews to inform their children of their true background at the age of thirteen, the traditional Jewish age of maturity. To divert suspicion from the family, frequently the eldest son was sent into the Church.⁴ Until recent years historians believed that by 1820 the "marrano" or "crypto-Jew" had disappeared from Mexico, completely absorbed into the Roman Catholic population. This was not completely true. Many had become devout Catholics, but others had not. The religion practiced by the descendants of these crypto-Jews had decayed and become corrupted; the true meaning of ceremony and prayer had been forgotten. However, the knowledge that the family was descended from Spanish or Portuguese Jews and was different from its authentic Roman Catholic neighbors was handed down through the years to each succeeding generation. As recently as 1969, a young Mexican marrano approached an American rabbi in a town near the California-Mexico border, and told him of his secret Jewish

³ Cecil Roth, A History of the Marranos (New York; Meridian Books, Inc. and Philadelphia; Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), pp. 57-60.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

background and of the ritual his parents carry out to this day.⁵ The ritual described is identical to that practiced by the seventeenth and eighteenth century marrano.⁶

The persistence of the marrano is an interesting historical phenomenon, but except for a few individuals, this group did not play a significant role in the development of Jewish community life in Mexico. I shall discuss the significant role of one exceptional marrano named Francisco Rivas, in a later chapter of this essay.

Mexico's beginnings as an independent nation in 1821 did not bring the peace and prosperity predicted by the leaders of the struggle against Spain. The short-lived Empire of Iturbide was succeeded by thirty-one tumultuous years dominated by the formidable Santa Anna. The liberal-conservative, federalist-centrist struggle raged; high sounding goals were proclaimed by the more able theorists of the new nation, but it seemed impossible to create the stable, prosperous conditions that would attract foreign immigration.

Aside from the political instability and economic uncertainty, independence did not bring religious freedom to Mexico. In 1822 a Catholic Empire was proclaimed, and in 1824 a Catholic Republic. In order to encourage European immigration which they considered essential to building

⁵ Rabbi Albert Plotkin, "Mexicali Marrano," Brotherhood (New York: National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, Jan-Feb 1970), pp. 18-19.

⁶ Roth, pp. 190-191.

a strong and stable nation, liberals such as Lorenzo Zavala and José Luis Mora urged religious toleration and suppression of the religious article in the constitution.⁷ To add to this list of obstacles to immigration, there was rampant banditry and complete lack of personal security as well as a peon labor system which automatically meant a wage scale far too low to attract the emigrant from Europe.⁸

In spite of these unpropitious conditions - political and economic chaos, complete absence of security, a semi-feudal labor system - some immigrants did come to Mexico. The beginnings of the Mexican nation coincided with the beginnings of massive emigration from Europe, especially from Germany. The end of the Napoleonic wars brought political reaction and

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Charles Hale, Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 165 & 179.

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In a recent article, Sanford Mosk, an economic historian, demonstrated a positive correlation between land-holding systems where huge holdings are worked by a dependent supply of cheap peon labor and low immigration rates. ("Latin American Versus the United States," in Do the Americans Have a Common History" A Critique of the Bolton Theory, ed. Lewis Hanke [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964], pp. 174-176.) José Luis Mora in 1833 recognized the obstacle to ownership of small property (the goal of most immigrants) presented by the large landholdings, but, revering private property, Mora believed that nothing could be done about it. (Hale, pp. 180-181.) José Covarrubias, a consultant to the Díaz government from 1900 to 1910 viewed latifundia as a major obstacle to spontaneous immigration and suggested property taxes as an inducement to landowners to sell their excess unproductive lands. (Varios informes sobre tierras y colonización [México: Secretaría de Fomento, 1912], p. 371.) A detailed analysis of the Mexican agrarian problem was published in 1909 by Andrés Molina Enríquez entitled Los grandes problemas nacionales (México: A Carranza e Hijos). Molina Enríquez later drafted the important agrarian reform article of the 1917 Constitution.

economic depression to the states of southwest Germany where many Jews were among those affected by the consequences of peace.⁹

The romantic reaction to the French Revolution manifested itself in a resurgence of orthodox Christianity as well as in political demands for the restoration of traditional monarchical government. As a result, particularly in the southern states of Germany, Jews were deprived of the civil rights so recently gained. Added to the political reaction, the end of the Continental blockade flooded the markets of continental Europe with cheap British goods with which local manufacturers could not compete. Thus, political and economic conditions combined to begin the Auswanderung.¹⁰

Some of the more mystical and conservative Germans migrated eastward toward Russia. The majority, however, crowded the Dutch ports and the ships bound for the New World. While more than 10,000 Germans landed in New York in the year 1827-1828, and not quite as many in Philadelphia and Baltimore, small groups traveled to all the countries of North and South America, including Mexico.¹¹

⁹ Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800 (Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), p. 5.

¹⁰ Mack Walker, Germany and the Emigration: 1816-1885 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 1-7.

¹¹ Wischnitzer, p. 4.

Among those who found their way to Mexican territory were pure adventurers like Adolphus Sterne. Sterne left Cologne in 1817 at the age of sixteen and settled first in New Orleans. By 1824 he had made his way to Texas. A daring, fun-loving young man, he delighted in the dangerous life of the west. The American colonists soon recognized him as a useful fellow to have around, for Sterne spoke not only German and English, but fluent Spanish and French. Sterne joined the colonists in their struggles against the Mexicans. During the Fredonian War he was captured and convicted of supplying flint and powder to the rebels. Young Adolphus was sentenced to be shot, and was chained to an old building in Nacogdoches waiting for his sentence to be carried out. Luckily for Sterne, an amnesty was declared and his life was spared. He did have to take an oath of allegiance to the Mexican government which ended his active participation in the Texan fight for independence.¹²

Some Jews with money to invest saw opportunity in Mexico. The brothers Jecker from Switzerland established themselves there by the 1830's. The older brother Luis was a skilled physician and surgeon. He quickly gained a fine reputation and was named Professor of Anatomy at the School of Medicine. Dr. Jecker decided to return to Europe in 1838. He donated his valuable medical library to the school, returned to Paris, and according to his biographer, led a wild life and

¹² Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, II (1894), 140-143. Hereafter abbreviated as AJHS.

committed suicide while still a young man. His younger brother, Juan Baptiste, was an adventurer and entrepreneur. He secured government contracts for surveying vacant lands in Mexico and contracts to build railroads. Of course, he is most famous (or infamous) for his high-priced loan to the government of General Miramón that is sometimes cited as one reason for the French intervention.¹³

The majority of the Jews who came to Mexico were neither adventurers nor entrepreneurs, but, like their counterparts in the United States, peddlers of notions, ribbons, and soaps. The Mexican book of Letters of Naturalization lists them as comerciantes.¹⁴ Like the peddlers in the northern republic, these men made the small towns of the interior their headquarters and sold their wares throughout the countryside. Most of the Jews who came to Mexico did not bother to become citizens of their new country, and in fact, until 1843 no Jew could legally become a Mexican citizen. In that year, however, the dictator, Santa Anna, repealed the law which had limited citizenship to Roman Catholics and had prohibited Mexican women from marrying outside the Church.¹⁵ Our records are

¹³ Rafael Heliodoro Valle, "La tragedia de los hermanos Jecker," Revista de Revistas (México), January 28, 1934.

¹⁴ Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. Sección de Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana. Clasificación decimal VII/521.2 (C3) 830-931. Topográfica L-E 1992. Asunto: Cartas de Naturalización Expedidas Por Esta Secretaría Durante Los Años de 1830-1931. (Hereafter referred to as Cartas de Naturalización.)

¹⁵ The Occident, I (Chicago, 1843), 155.

limited to those Jews who did become naturalized Mexicans, and among this group the pattern that emerges is clear.

At least ten (10) of the men who became citizens of the Mexican Republic in the 1840's had distinctly Jewish names. Of the ten, five were from Germany, three from France, one from Poland, and one from Turkey. Frederick Glandenberg, Eduardo Behr, and Martin Nurnberg all settled in Zacatecas; Jorge Ritman and Enrique Levy went to Veracruz; Luis Weis, from Poland, settled in Tamaulipas; Juan Gauttman went to San Luis Potosí; Salamon Nudaira to Santiago; only one, Luis Seidel, listed his residence as Mexico City.¹⁶

Jews in Mexico may have been few, but the Jewish soldiers who fought for the United States against Mexico from 1846 to 1848 managed to find them. Jacob Hirschorn was one of these soldiers. Newly arrived from Bavaria and alone in New York City, sixteen-year old Hirschorn spent his days sitting in the Café de Paris on Broadway, reading the "Help Wanted" ads in the New York Tribune and browsing through a French newspaper. One day he was approached by a former French nobleman who persuaded him to volunteer for the New York regiment of the United States Army to fight the Mexican War. "You will serve Uncle Sam and see the world" was the sales pitch. Hirschorn's memoirs, written years later at the urging of his children and grandchildren, tell of his induction, his travels, the three month siege of Puebla, and of the

¹⁶ Cartas de Naturalización.

capture of Chapultepec. Once the city of Mexico was held by the Americans, his commanding officer ordered Hirschorn to go out and forage for anything he could get. Riding through the streets, a sign reading "Brasseria Allemana" caught Hirschorn's eye, and he stopped and knocked at the door. After repeated knocking a frightened woman answered. Speaking in his most polite German, Hirschorn assured her that she need not be afraid - the Americans were not after her money or valuables - they needed something to eat and lots of beer. Cigars, too, would be appreciated, and Hirschorn offered to pay for these. The woman got out an old box of Wheeling stogies and asked Hirschorn for ten dollars for them - more than the food, cigars, and terrible Mexican beer were worth. Hirschorn wrote out the order for ten U.S. gold dollars and signed it. With this, the woman called her husband who was hiding upstairs, and introduced him as a landsman (a fellow Jew from the same part of Europe). From that moment a special relationship existed, advantageous to both the American Army and the owners of the Brasseria Allemana. Hirschorn described the meeting with the proprietor and the agreement that followed:

We shook hands and I promised him to become his protector and to influence our boys to do their drinking at his place. At the same time, I wrote my address for him, regiment and all, and told him that at any time any of our boys should get drunk and cut up at his place, to send for me. I then went into an adjoining room with him and after a little conversation I had received a pointer which enabled me to return to camp with a wagonload of straw and ten barrels of flour. On leaving the beer shop, the old lady handed me a parcel to show her gratitude for my kind

actions. Upon opening it in my tent that night, found it to contain about a dozen slices of ham, four slices of bread, and another bottle of that stuff called beer.¹⁷

Jacob Hirschorn did not find any religious services in Mexico City. Perhaps if he had been stationed in Matamoros, he would have been invited to the home of another German Jew, John Melvin Hirsch. The Hirsch family moved to Matamoros from Brownsville, Texas during the occupation. They were quite friendly with General Winfield Scott and General Taylor, and for a time the two generals used their home as headquarters. The Hirsch home was also the Jewish headquarters, and the attic was the scene of secret services on the New Year Holy Days. Hirsch's grandson wrote an account of these days in Mexico that tells us that Mexican Jews as well as Americans knew the Hirsch home.

Jewish worship being prohibited in Mexico, my Grandfather's attic was used as a secret place for worship and as a meeting place for their coreligionists. One Yom Kippur the family had with them a Spanish Jew who used the garb of a Catholic friar to effect his escape from the interior.¹⁸

The very term, "the interior," was designed to make the spine tingle. "So fanatic are these Mexicans that no Jew

¹⁷ Jacob Hirschorn, "Reminiscences of a Volunteer," American Israelite (Cincinnati), July 16, 1903, p. 5.

¹⁸ Alexander R. Hirsch, "A Sketch of the Hirsch's" in "Mexico Miscellaneous Material on Mexican Jewry," in the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, Director Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus. The American Jewish Archives will be abbreviated hereafter as AJA.

can safely penetrate into the interior," dramatically warned the Jewish Chronicle of London.¹⁹ This may have frightened some, but Jews continued to come to Mexico and to settle in the "interior." In the 1850's fifteen Jewish immigrants made new homes for themselves in Aguascalientes, Baja California, Jalapa, Jalisco, Durango, Veracruz, and Oaxaca, as well as Mexico City.²⁰

The Revolutions of 1848 had stimulated a new wave of emigration from the continent. Most of the Jews who came were comerciantes as before, but among these immigrants were a few professionally educated men and dedicated republicans. One of these was Isidoro Epstein. He came to Mexico in 1851 just after completing his studies at the Polytechnic School of Hesse Cassel and the University of Marburg. Epstein settled in Aguascalientes where he taught mathematics and German at the Literary Institute. He was appointed Director of municipal works and was assigned to produce a plan of the city and map of the state of Aguascalientes, which he completed in 1857. In 1870 Epstein founded the first German language newspaper to be published in Mexico.²¹ His dual role as spokesman for the German community in Mexico and fighter against anti-semitism will be discussed in a later chapter.

¹⁹ The Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer (London), June 6, 1862.

²⁰ Cartas de Naturalización.

²¹ Isidoro Epstein, "Algo para la historia del periodismo en México," Germania (Mexico City), June 21, 1890, p. 1.

Another liberal arrival was Emanuel Weiss who wrote for the French language daily, L'Estafette. In one of his articles Weiss urged European immigration as the solution to Mexico's financial problems.²² As stated earlier, the stimulation of immigration was an integral part of Mexican liberal policy. With the triumph of the Liberals over Santa Anna, the Mexican Congress passed the laws of the Reforma in 1855 and 1856. Jewish periodicals in Europe and the United States applauded the 1856 law which opened immigration to non-Catholics. Die Deborah, published in Cincinnati, hailed "the end of the rule of clericalism," and Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise saw the new law as the beginning of a healthy current of immigration to Mexico, "a country of untapped opportunity."²³

The Reforma and the Constitution of 1857 did not, however, bring stable liberal government to Mexico. By 1858 the Conservative party was back in power, and in 1859 the reaction was felt by at least one Jewish family living in a small town in Mexico.

Public education in Mexico was still in its infancy, and the government schools that did exist were only for the primary grades. Therefore, the two sons of Adolph Blumenkorn of Puebla attended the Catholic high school, El Colegio de Espiritu

²² "Colonization," L'Estafette, March 18, 1861, cited by Alfred Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, "The Intervention Movement and Empire Seen Through the Eyes of the Mexican Press," Hispanic American Historical Review, XXI (1947), 219.

²³ Die Deborah (Cincinnati), September 5, 1856, p. 17.

Santo. In 1859 the boys were expelled from the school because they had been raised as Jews. Their father, an American citizen who later served as the American consul in Mexico, had been living in Puebla for eleven years, and his religion had never been a secret. Mr. Blumenkorn wrote to his brother in New Orleans that the expulsion, coming after the boys had attended the school for some five months, "seems to be a new determination on the part of some of the officers of the institution to revive some old, hitherto dead law of the days of intolerance, unhappily now again returned." The older boy, Miguel, had been born in New Orleans, but Daniel, the younger, was born in Puebla, "where he has been in school ever since he was old enough to go, without any objection on the score of religion ever before having been made."²⁴

This incident illustrates one of the general characteristics of independent Mexico - that Mexico City was not Mexico. While the capital city would lead the way in adopting liberal attitudes, including a cosmopolitan acceptance of the Jews who lived there, the countryside of Mexico would remain deeply Catholic and intolerant.

In fact, the City of Mexico by 1861 was the site of an active Jewish community which met regularly, collected sizable funds for needy Jews and for religious affairs, and held

²⁴ The Occident, XVII (1859), 12. For Blumenkorn's service as American consul under President Grant, see American Israelite, January 7, 1881.

services on the important Jewish holidays in the Masonic Hall. The French intervention and the war disrupted this developing community. Although Maximilian brought with him about one hundred Jewish families from Austria and Belgium, the community lost the French democrats and socialists who had been active members until 1861.²⁵

In spite of the liberal constitution of 1857, secrecy still surrounded Jewish worship. A description of Jewish community affairs in Mexico City was published by the Jewish Chronicle of London in 1862:

MEXICO - THE JEWS

Our friend, who we are sorry to say, though taking a deep interest in Judaism, passes for a pious Catholic in the City of Mexico and holds a high municipal office, informs us that on account of the invasion the religious affairs of our brethren were neglected during the past year; nothing was done beyond the collection of about two thousand dollars for this purpose where ten times this amount could have been realized, he assures us, had peace prevailed. The so-called Masonic Lodge was rented again, provided with regalia and insignia, of course belonging to the synagogue to be used for the annual sessions of the Grand Council, viz. to meet on the autumnal High Holy Days for divine worship. High standing Mexicans are pleased with the idea of having a synagogue in the city - the monks and the populace, of course, would run mad if they were to know it. Our friend regrets the loss of several French Jews who left the capital on account of the war, but he continues in his highly interesting letter that we were reinforced by several Dutch and Belgian brethren who were quite surprised at being led one day into a private room of a coffee house

²⁵ Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer,
November 21, 1862, p. 7.

to find fifteen sons of Abraham convened for the purpose of discussing congregational matters.²⁶

One authority identifies the secret correspondent as Abraham Watters of San Francisco.²⁷ Watters had been traveling to Mexico on business at least since 1852 when he and his partner in a jewelry business were arrested and accused by the Mexican government of conspiring against the Mexican nation. After his release, Watters filed a claim against the Mexican government, asking for the value of a case of jewelry that had been confiscated as well as compensation for the unjustified arrest.²⁸ In 1860, Watters was appointed "Inspector of Masonic Lodges," and in this capacity made frequent trips to Mexico.²⁹

A few of the anecdotes reported by Watters to the Jewish Chronicle indicate that European Jews in Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century discovered the paradoxical heritage of secret Judaism in the land where the Inquisition had ended only a few decades earlier. When forty of the one hundred Jewish men in the city arranged to hold their religious services in the Masonic Hall in the fall of 1861, the high ranking Mexican Mason to whom they confided their plans, surprised them with his enthusiastic response. Confessing

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, VII, 443.

²⁸ "Claim of Abraham Watters and Henry Lichtenstein" and "Memorial to the Joint Commission of the United States and the Republic of Mexico," 1853-1870. Printed and manuscript, and in Mexico Miscellaneous file, AJA.

²⁹ Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, VII, 433.

that he, himself, was a descendant of a Jewish family, the Mexican official offered to donate a large sum of money toward the building of a synagogue in Mexico City.³⁰ Another time, a European Jewish woman, who was shopping in town, recognized a few Hebrew words spoken by a shopkeeper to his wife. When the lady identified herself as a fellow Jew, she was invited to the apartment of the Mexican Jews and shown exquisite old Portuguese treasures, Italian marbles from the Renaissance period, and a few very old Hebrew books.³¹

Watters continued as correspondent for the Chronicle throughout the 1860's. His reports reveal the uncertainty with which world Jewry viewed the liberal Catholic Empire of Maximilian. One day an optimistic report appeared citing the opening of a Protestant church with the comment that perhaps it would not be long before a synagogue would be built in Mexico.³² A few days later appeared the notice that Jews were barred from the service of the Emperor.³³ When Maximilian declared that "a loyal and complete tolerance be accorded to all religious denomination, the Chronicle printed the Imperial Decree in full with enthusiastic praise and high hopes for freedom of religion in Mexico.³⁴ However, the following week

30. Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer, March 14, 1862.

31. Ibid., November 21, 1862.

32. Ibid., January 15, 1864

33. Ibid., February 5, 1864.

34. Ibid., May 12, 1865. A long delay for the Imperial Decree of February 26 published in Diario del Imperio, February 27, 1865.

the rebuttal of the Bishops was published, and the editor admitted with resignation that "Mexico is an intensely Catholic country and her detestation of the doctrine of tolerance has at all times energetically manifested itself."³⁵

Uncertainty about the Empire was expressed also in the United States. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, who had been so optimistic in 1856, believed in 1864 that it would not be long before "Mexico will be once again in the hands of the clerics."³⁶

Within Mexico confusion prevailed. Foreign immigration became the cornerstone of imperial policy. Even the Catholics agreed that Mexico needed people and income, but as to who these people should be, there was absolutely no agreement. The editor of the L'Estafette remarked with disgust:

Everyone has regeneration on his lips, but not in his heart. We heard these objections constantly - Poles were unreliable; Germans were not pure Catholics; drank beer, and smoked pipes; the French were too radical; and Southerners were rebels.³⁷

The question remained, "What kind of immigrant?" and two Jewish men who happened to be in Mexico offered their opinions. Mr. L. Simon had prospected for gold in Australia and in 1865 was seeking further treasure in Mexico. Convinced that the mineral deposits in the mountains of the country were the key to Mexican prosperity, Simon urged the government to bring miners to Mexico. It should be no problem to bring 400,000 [sic] miners to the country within six months, and in

³⁵ Ibid., May 19, 1865.

³⁶ Die Deborah, July 29, 1864.

³⁷ L'Estafette, June 22, 1865, cited by Alfred J. and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, XXI (1947), 235.

a short time, predicted Simon, the country would be booming for "The future is there and only there."³⁸ Simon's letter published in L'Estafette on April 6, 1865, was answered three days later by Dr. Max Lilienthal, a well-known American rabbi who happened to be in Mexico "charged with gathering information regarding setting up a colony for his European compatriots." "What suits Australia would be a calamity for Mexico," wrote Lilienthal, denying any similarity between the two countries. He asserted the impossibility of feeding 400,000 miners and claimed that miners were not desirable colonists since their sole object was to amass money and then go elsewhere. Dr. Lilienthal believed that agriculture in the long run would produce more wealth for Mexico.³⁹ Lilienthal was interested in finding a home and economic security for Jews from Russia. In Mexico, opportunity in agriculture was a distinct possibility, but Lilienthal could not consider Russian Jews as miners. It would be another sixteen years before anti-Jewish riots would become czarist policy and Jews would begin to emigrate en masse from Russia, but due to a personal experience as a young man, Dr. Lilienthal was one of the few Jewish leaders aware of the growing problem in Russia.

In 1840 as a newly ordained rabbi in Germany, Lilienthal had accepted an assignment from Czar Nicholas I to supervise

³⁸ "De L'immigration," L'Estafette, April 6, 1865, cited by Hanna, pp. 230-231.

³⁹ "Response de Dr. Max Lilienthal," L'Estafette, April 9, 1865, cited by Hanna, p. 231.

the organization of a system of Jewish schools in Russia that would incorporate the teaching of Russian and secular subjects with traditional Jewish studies. The Russian Jews knew at once, and Lilienthal soon realized that the object of the Russian plan was the ultimate destruction of the religious and cultural basis of Jewish loyalty as prerequisite for the development of "good Russians."⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, nothing developed from Lilienthal's trip to Mexico. Civil War with its inherent political and economic instability does not create propitious conditions for colonization. During the period of intervention and Empire, from 1861 to 1867, only five Jews became naturalized citizens of Mexico.⁴¹

Although the future of the Mexican nation looked precarious, at least one Jew who came to Mexico expressed complete confidence in the personal sincerity and liberalism of the Emperor Maximilian. This man was Dr. Samuel Basch, a Jew who had been summoned from his position at the General Hospital in Vienna in 1866 to serve as personal physician to the Emperor.⁴² Dr. Basch was completely loyal to Maximilian

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Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile to the Establishment of Israel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), p. 604.

41

Cartas de Naturalización.

42

Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer,
March 16, 1866.

and was very proud that he was trusted as one of the Emperor's few confidants. Dr. Basch remained with the ill-fated ruler through his capture, trial, and execution, and accompanied the body back to Vienna. The doctor left an account of the last year and a half of Maximilian's reign, particularly interesting for its comments on Mexican liberalism. Maximilian was a usurper, the tool of the ambitious Napoleon III of France. But the misguided Maximilian and his loyal supporters naively believed that the Emperor ruled Mexico with the support of the Mexican people and for their benefit. Personally a believer in European liberal principles, Maximilian did not abrogate the Constitution of 1857 and pursued many of the same policies as the government he overthrew. To Dr. Basch, whose thought echoed that of the Emperor, Mexican liberalism seemed strictly partisan and nationalistic, completely intolerant of disagreement, while Maximilian personified true liberalism - that is the guarantee of individual freedom and respect for individual differences.⁴³ It is interesting to note that the Countess Paula Kollonitz, who had served as a lady-in-waiting to Empress Carlotta, published an account of her stay in Mexico two years before the publication of Basch's Recuerdos, and her analysis of Mexican liberalism is identical to that of Dr. Basch.⁴⁴

⁴³ Samuel Basch, Recuerdos de México: memorias del médico ordinario de Emperador Maximiliano (1866 a 1877), trans. D. Manuel Pareño (México: N. Chavez, 1870), pp. 13-14, 81-82.

⁴⁴ Countess Paula Kollonitz, The Court of Mexico, trans. J. E. Olivant (London, 1868), p. 213.

The defeat of Maximilian and the restoration of the republic brought optimistic predictions of peace, prosperity, and European immigration from the victorious Liberal leaders. With the struggle between the monarchists and republicans permanently ended, President Juárez urged immigration to help develop Mexico. But in the decade from 1867 to 1877 the results were disappointing.⁴⁵ As for Jews in the restored republic, aside from the naturalization of some seventeen immigrants from different parts of Europe, there is almost no news of Jewish community life. There are no reports during this period in the London Chronicle, in the Berliner Zeitung (which had reported plans to build a synagogue in Mexico City in 1863), or in the American Jewish press. The Jews of Mexico seem to have disappeared. More likely, they had "gone underground." Why is there no word of Jewish activity during the period when liberalism had triumphed and the law of the land guaranteed complete freedom of conscience? For one reason, it appears that in Mexico, the practice of the Jewish religion was not strictly related to law. In Mexico, Jews seem to run their religious affairs by instinct. For many years fear, rather than the Constitution or actual anti-semitic practice, conditioned secretive behavior. The heritage of the

⁴⁵ Luis González y González, Emma Cosío Villegas, y Guadalupe Monroy, Historia moderna de México: La República Restaurada: La vida social, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1956), pp. 140-145.

⁴⁶ Cartas de Naturalización.

Inquisition and the knowledge that Mexico was a devoutly Catholic country continued to leave its mark on Jewish behavior long after the liberalization of the laws.

However, in view of the fact that Jewish community life did begin to develop in the 1850's in Mexico, fear and superstition do not adequately explain the silence regarding Mexican-Jewish activity between the end of the Empire and the last decade of the Porfiriato. After all, we have evidence that by 1861 there was a viable Jewish community in Mexico City, a community well enough organized to purchase religious items, hold services, collect funds, and dispense charity. The explanation for the silence after 1867 may well be in a change in the nature of Mexican liberalism. While the liberalism of the Reforma was tolerant of religious differences, the liberalism of the Restored Republic and early Porfiriato was actually anti-religious.

The philosophy of the leaders of the Reforma was in the tradition of the eighteenth century ideologues of the French Revolution. The emphasis of the Mexican Liberals was upon the very root of the word liberalism - liber meaning "free" - and individual freedom was the essence of the philosophy. Even though Mexican liberalism was primarily anti-clerical - its object to destroy the power of the fueros (special privileges and exemptions) of church and army - respect for individual rights was an integral part of the thinking of the leaders. This is why religious tolerance fit easily into their program from the days of independence. The triumph of

the Reforma brought to the educated classes of Mexico the assurance that they could express their individual differences without criticism. The Jews of Mexico began to meet and to identify themselves to each other, and to plan communal undertakings. Had not the Chronicle correspondent of 1862 reported that "the educated classes are pleased with the idea of a synagogue in the city?"

With the defeat of Maximilian and the restoration of the Republic, the triumph of liberalism was finally achieved. Juárez was president once again, and the time had come to implement the long promised aspirations of liberalism. From speeches and promises and liberal dreams, Juárez determined to make real policies that would benefit the Mexican nation. However, the Juárez who came to the Presidency in 1867 was not the same man who had occupied that position in 1857. Ten years of foreign invasion, war, and chaos had taught him the dangers of extreme liberalism.⁴⁷

To Juárez it seemed clear that liberty meant weakness and defeat; therefore, a positive definite program to strengthen the Mexican nation had to be his first concern. Juárez introduced positivism as the official government philosophy with his appointment of Gabbino Barreda, a disciple of Comte, to the post of Minister of Education in 1867.

⁴⁷ Patrick Romanell, Making of the Mexican Mind (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), p. 45.

However, both Leopoldo Zea and Edmundo O'Gorman, the leading intellectual historians and philosophers of Mexico, remind us that this was no overnight change, for within Mexican liberalism were the characteristics that made positivism the logical philosophy to succeed it. One such quality was the emphasis on material progress and the conviction that material progress depended upon an active middle class of merchants and entrepreneurs. More than thirty years before Barreda's appointment, José Luis Mora, the author of the Reform Plan of 1833, had insisted that material prosperity depended on:

. . . work, industry, and wealth (to) make a man really and reliably virtuous. In rendering him independent of all the rest, these three imbue him with the firmness and noble valor of character which resist oppression and baffle any attempt at bribery.⁴⁸

The gradual change in Mexican liberalism toward a more uniform philosophy is also apparent in the change in Mora's attitude toward religious tolerance in Mexico. The early Mora was a firm advocate of tolerance, but after the defeat by the United States in 1848, he advocated restricting immigration to Roman Catholics in order to create a more homogeneous and consequently strong Mexico.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Leopoldo Zea, "Positivism and Porfirism in Latin America," trans. Helene Weyl, in Ideological Differences and World Order, ed. F. S. O. Northrop (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 176.

⁴⁹ Hale, p. 211.

Edmundo O'Gorman in a series of essays, Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano, pointed out that from the day that Mexican independence was achieved, both Liberals and Conservatives aimed at building a strong prosperous nation capable of maintaining its independence. The ideas of the opposing parties differed as to which policies would best achieve this aim, and the liberal path held from its beginnings the seeds of positivism. Maximilian, according to O'Gorman, had been the latest to advance the process toward positivism in his desire to make Mexico a great Empire. Maximilian's encouragement of European immigrants who would mingle with the Mexican people and raise their standards implied a positivist kind of racism as well as the belief that an elite group should set the standards and lead the way toward material development.⁵⁰

Another factor that would tend to inhibit religious organization was the very individualism that characterized Mexican liberalism. Justo Sierra, one of the chief exponents of positivist thinking in Mexico, wrote in 1874 that: "In democracies the only sovereign is the individual. . . . The idea of the social contract resulting in the mutual sacrifice of liberty is erroneous . . . liberty is a right and every right has a corresponding duty."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Edmundo O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra y los orígenes de la Universidad de México, 1910," Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), p. 164.

⁵¹ Justo Sierra, Periodismo político, ed. Augustin Yañez (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1948), pp. 57-58. Reprinted from La Tribuna, Feb. 20, 1874.

It is the word "duty" that links the role of the individual to the state. Sierra insists that it is:

. . . the duty of every free citizen to support the government in all actions that will contribute to the welfare of the community . . . (and) the duty of the government is to develop individual initiative by means of public instruction, to give it free access in all its applications, to organize a vast system of colonization, and to encourage enterprises towards the great task (of building the nation).⁵²

The role of education in this system was to create citizens capable of contributing to the "great task." When Gabino Barreda accepted the post of Minister of Education, his assignment was to establish an education system in Mexico that would make Mexico a modern nation; that would make possible material progress; that would educate the people to subordinate the corporatist ideal to that of bringing material benefits to the entire nation.⁵³

Progress was the goal of the positivists, and although Barreda had changed the European slogan of "Love, Order and Progress" to "Liberty, Order and Progress," the leaders of the Restored Republic were convinced that "order" was the first essential for progress. Therefore, order must take precedence over liberty, and liberty would have to wait

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Leopoldo Zea, Del liberalismo a la revolución en la educación mexicana (México: Biblioteca del Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1956), p. 84.

until that day when the people were educated to use liberty wisely for the material benefit of the nation.

Barreda's program of positivist education emphasized the concrete, practical, non-ideological, and empirically demonstrable.

The National Preparatory School was the physical manifestation of the positivist philosophy. The law passed in December of 1867 and the reforms added in 1869 provided for a common course of study to be followed by all students at the pre-professional level. "The school was converted into a plant" from which every student would emerge not only prepared for later studies, but with a "well-organized, complete, and finalized" uniform body of knowledge.⁵⁴

Since Barreda believed that all conflicting interpretations were due to "deep-seated unrecognized prejudices," he claimed that his program of teaching "truth" as it was demonstrated empirically would eventually eliminate not only the conflicting interpretations, but all prejudice as well. In Barreda's view, the best way to accomplish this was to establish for Mexicans: ". . . a common fund of truths . . . not only as the requisite preliminary for peace and social order, but also because it will make all citizens feel the same way and have uniform opinions."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ O'Gorman, p. 177.

⁵⁵ Gabino Barreda, "Carta dirigida al C. Marino Riva Palacio," Opúsculos, discusiones, y discursos (México: Dublán y Chávez, 1877) cited in Zea's Del liberalismo, pp. 93-94.

Here, of course, is the core of positivism and its chief deterrent to open religious expression. Since truth is limited to what could be demonstrated empirically, the positivist program allowed no room for idealism and denied the validity of individual opinion. The implications for religion follow logically. The religion of Progress was the only true religion; the scientific, empirical approach automatically consigned any metaphysical religious belief to the foolish or the ignorant.

In adapting positivism to Mexican needs, however, Barreda and his followers recognized the impossibility of instituting Comte's religion of progress in a deeply Catholic people, and never attempted this. As a result, religion never became a part of the official positivist program in Mexico. It is interesting to note, however, that Benito Juárez once suggested to Justo Sierra that he would like to see all the Indians converted to Protestantism because "they need a religion that will teach them to read and not to waste their pennies on candles for the saints."⁵⁶ These were the words of a man impatient for material progress, but in truth, Mexican positivism was anti-Catholic, anti-liberal, and anti-religious, for it denied every principle of traditional authority and any abstract principle that was not demonstrated

⁵⁶ Justo Sierra, The Political Evolution of the Mexican People, trans. Charles Randall (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 348.

through experience.⁵⁷ In fact, to counter Catholicism was the very purpose of positivism according to Edmundo O'Gorman. The government urgently needed a dogma to oppose the Catholic dogma and found it in positivism.⁵⁸

Although Mexican positivism never officially embraced the religion of morality and progress, certain periodicals did follow the positivist line. El Libre Pensador, published in Mexico City in 1870, carried a series of articles signed by the pseudonym Eleutheros, in which the author analyzed the Old Testament. Eleutheros explained the empirical reasons for the laws of Deuteronomy and the teachings of Ezra, finding that the ancient laws were based on historical realities of the time. The author expressed his certainty that when the Jewish people of the nineteenth century realized that the conditions that made the biblical religion meaningful no longer existed, they would then embrace the "true religion of Progress, which guides men to live by the highest moral principles for the general welfare of society."⁵⁹

It seems that there is a relationship between the official policy of positivism as the accepted philosophy of the Mexican state, and the virtual absence of any accounts of Jewish religious activity during the same period. This does not mean to suggest that Jews in Mexico were all intellectuals

⁵⁷ Zea, Del liberalismo, p. 92.

⁵⁸ O'Gorman, p. 175.

⁵⁹ El Libre Pensador, I (Mexico, 1870), 150-155, 225-230, 241-246, 289-294, 305-312.

who read El Libre Pensador or listened to Barreda's speeches and accepted positivism as "truth." It does suggest that the philosophy and educational system of the elite group does create an atmosphere which permeates the society, and which is felt, if not analyzed or understood, by the middle groups. The atmosphere in Mexico had changed from the tolerance of individual difference that was part of the early Reforma to the anti-religious empirical stance of the Positivist Republic.

This official philosophy articulated in 1867 under the aegis of the Restored Republic was not fully implemented until ten years later with the government of Porfirio Díaz. When he took over the presidency by force and fraudulent election, Mexico may have been philosophically in order, but physically, "the country was a wreck."⁶⁰ Educational and cultural programs existed only on paper; civil war had left the countryside to the bandits and guerrillas except where a local caudillo maintained the peace; unemployed vagabonds wandered about the streets of the cities; the "middle and upper classes hid their money and their sympathies from the local tyrants and the warring governments." All in all, Mexico seemed to have proved to the world that she was an ungovernable country.⁶¹

Before all else Mexico desperately needed peace. As Porfirio Díaz set out to achieve internal order, the political

⁶⁰ Justo Sierra, The Political Evolution, p. 357.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 357-358.

philosophy that was to support his every move was already officially established in the land. To use the metaphor coined by Edmundo O'Gorman, "positivism was the ring that fit the finger" of Porfirian policy.⁶² Diaz set out to construct a government based on authority and morality. Through his policy of pan o pelo (bread or the club), he soon achieved internal order and the reputation for strict honesty that would characterize his long rule. Now the time had come for progress.

Here, too, the positivist philosophy served his purposes exactly, as he took practical measures to establish the nation's credit by encouraging European capital investment and immigration, and by cooperating with the North American railroad companies. Justo Sierra, concerned about the dangers of such authoritarian government, nevertheless expressed the positivist conviction that before liberty could be granted, every possible measure must be taken to strengthen the nation. Sierra concluded his synthesis of Mexican history, The Political Evolution of the Mexican People, with the admission that the whole evolution of the Mexican people "will be for nothing if the final goal of liberty is not achieved." Yet he admitted with positivist resignation that "Liberty . . . has always been, among nations as among individuals, the patrimony of the strong; the weak have never been free."⁶³

⁶² Edmundo O'Gorman, p. 171. O'Gorman used the phrase to describe the relationship of Positivism to the Restored Republic. It certainly fits Porfirian policy as well.

⁶³ Sierra, The Political Evolution, p. 368.

Throughout the thirty-three years of Porfirian rule, positivism dominated the political, economic, and intellectual life of Mexico, but just as the seeds of positivism can be found in the liberalism that preceded it, the beginnings of a new variety of liberalism can be seen within the very empirical philosophy of the elite.

Leopoldo Zea believes that in the very anti-religious and anti-liberal position of positivism, in its very insistence upon the reality of experience, lies the basis for a new liberalism, and for genuine social reform based on Mexican realities.⁶⁴ By the time that positivism reached the apex of its influence in Mexico, critical articles often written by the puro liberals of the Reforma period, began to appear in the intellectual journals of the nation. For example, as early as 1882, José María Vigil criticized positivism because what can be properly applied to the observable "what is," cannot be properly applied to the philosophical and moral sciences which deal with "what ought to be."⁶⁵

The education programs sponsored by the positivists brought to Mexico foreign educators such as Enrique Rebsamen and Enrique Laubscher to prepare students so that they would be able to handle some future liberty. These educators as well as others took their assignment seriously and educated a generation of young intellectuals who came to think for themselves

⁶⁴ Zea, Del Liberalismo, pp. 100-105.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 124, citing José María Vigil, Revista Filosófica (México, 1882).

and to criticize the single standard of truth taught by positivism.

Joaquín Barranda, who served as Minister of Education from 1882 to 1901, started out with the assignment of forming citizens prepared to contribute one day to the welfare of the Mexican nation. Barranda, however, found that in order to accomplish this he had to give up the single uniform program that had been the basis of positivist education. Barranda denied the positivist doctrine of the inherent inequality of races, and blamed the destitute condition of the Mexican Indian on centuries of neglect and exploitation. Convinced that with proper education, the inequities of race would be overcome, Barranda called for a system of popular education and popular culture that would be meaningful - that, in positivist terms, would be based upon the realities of the experience of the destitute races.⁶⁶

The ideas of Justo Sierra provide an interesting illustration of the seeds of the coming liberalism within the thought of a confirmed positivist. Certain as he was of the need for order and progress, a firm believer in the superiority of the European race, and an advocate of education for strength before all else, nevertheless, Justo Sierra never gave up his strong devotion to liberty. This was his goal for all the citizens of Mexico, and even in 1890 he insisted upon the inviolability of the home and the private school. He viewed

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 151.

these as matters beyond the domain of the government, and defended the right of a father to educate his child as he saw fit. Thus the anti-religious positivist supported the right of a father to give his child a religious education if he so chose.⁶⁷

These are only a few examples of the beginnings of a new liberalism in Mexico. Thus, as the beginnings of positivism can be demonstrated years before its official adoption and full effects were felt in Mexico, the decline of positivism, and the beginnings of a more liberal spirit, more tolerant of individual differences, can be demonstrated well before the Revolution of 1910 which officially ended the reign of positivist philosophy in Mexico.

The decline of positivism and the presence of a more liberal atmosphere became apparent in the first decade of the twentieth century, which happened to be the last decade of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. It is in this period that Jewish religious activity was first carried on openly in Mexico and that the modern Jewish community began its development.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 170-175.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE PORFIRIATO: 1877-1899

Porfirio Díaz overthrew the government of Lerdo de Tejada in 1876 and assumed the presidency of Mexico in 1877. The Porfirian regime would last for 34 years: a period of dictatorship, enforced peace, and economic development which would bring wealth to foreign investors and a small Mexican upper class at the expense of the masses of Mexican peasants and laborers. Immigration, which continued to be a prime goal of the new government, had been a complete failure in the pre-Díaz years. In fact each year of the Restored Republic, from 1867 to 1876, the number of emigrants from Mexico exceeded by 3,000 the number of immigrants to Mexico.¹ The French Intervention, Civil War, and continued disturbances of the Restored Republic evidently caused the majority of Jews as well as other foreigners who had lived in Mexico to leave the country.

In contrast to the year 1862, when over one hundred Jewish families were reported to be actively considering building a synagogue in Mexico City, by 1879 the Jewish population of the city was reduced to "only twenty-some families, and therefore, no community (could) be formed."²

¹ Luis González y González, "El hombre y la tierra," in Historia moderna de México. La República Restaurada: La vida económica, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1956), p. 143.

² Der Israelite (Frankfort), December 10, 1879. Reprinted from Jewish World (London).

An unidentified correspondent described the life of the few Jewish people in the Mexican capital in a letter to a London periodical, Jewish World. The Jewish residents held regular services in the home of the oldest Jewish man living in the city, one Mr. Bernard Weiner, whose wife was the daughter of a prominent family named Levy from Bordeaux. The correspondent reported "with regret" that "most young men marry non-Jewish girls and are therefore unable to bring up their children in the Jewish faith." This practice prevailed throughout the Porfiriato, and helps to explain not only why the Jews in Mexico failed to organize a formal congregation, but also the number of Catholic families in Mexico today with names such as Levy and Herzog. Although most boy infants were not circumcised as a result of the mixed marriages, some babies were to be raised as Jews, and people were known to have paid between four hundred and six hundred dollars for importing mohels from New Orleans "to perform the circumcision which brings a child into the Law of Abraham."³

Most interesting is the description of a cosmopolitan and tolerant atmosphere in Mexico City, where, "in spite of the fact that the Roman Catholic religion predominates, Jews are treated most liberally." The correspondent wrote, "I have spent many years here, but never have I heard the word 'Jew' mentioned with contempt, but, on the contrary, the Mexicans show only sympathy and respect to the Jews."⁴ In all

³Der Israelite, December 10, 1879. See also Jewish Chronicle, August 27, 1880.

⁴Ibid.

likelihood the writer who lived in the Mexican capital, was referring to the educated upper class of the city who, even fifteen years earlier, in 1862, had "welcomed the idea of a synagogue in the city."⁵

This report of "sympathy and respect" indicative of a liberal attitude toward Jews in Mexico City may seem contradictory to the Positivism which was official government policy by 1879. The paradox can be explained by the phenomenon which sociologists call "cultural lag." The term is used to define the time lag in the development in one aspect of society in comparison with another.⁶ Historically, a period of years usually elapses between the articulation of new ideas or values by an intellectual elite and the gradual acceptance of the philosophy by the dominant groups of the society. So it was with positivism. By 1879 a group of intellectuals, led by a few professors in the National Preparatory School were urging modifications in the uniform program to permit individual liberty of thought and the "spiritual element of hope."⁷ Thus, while among the business and government elite, the liberalism of the Reforma was gradually changing to positivist thought, the pseudoscientific philosophy was losing its appeal for the intellectuals.

⁵ Jewish Chronicle (London), November 21, 1862.

⁶ A. Boskoff, "Social Change," in Modern Sociological Theory in Continuity and Change, eds. H. Becker and A. Boskoff (New York: The Dryden Press, 1957), pp. 209-301.

⁷ Edmundo O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra y los orígenes de la Universidad de México 1910," in Seis estudios de tema mexicano (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), p. 183.

In these early years under Porfirio Díaz the Jewish population was small and data concerning the Jews is scarce. Nevertheless, the available evidence indicates that after 1879 the Jewish population steadily increased, and although no formal organization was formed, there was at all times Jewish activity in some form. The increase in the Jewish population in Mexico City is indicated by the letters of naturalization issued to new citizens, by the number of Jewish businesses lining the commercial streets of Mexico City, by the many patents and privileges registered by the Government, and less reliably, by the official census figures. There were also in Mexico individual Jews who exerted influence out of proportion to their numbers. Some few, by virtue of their wealth or family position, enjoyed international prominence as bankers, financiers, or industrialists. Others, though not wealthy nor of prominent families, were influential in molding public opinion as writers, editors, and publishers in Mexico. A final piece of evidence of Jewish activity in Mexico between 1877 and 1900 is a published account of a congregation formed by ten Sephardic Jews.

The most prominent Jews in Mexico during the Porfiriato were Frenchmen from Alsace, and among this group, Eduardo Noetzlin, as head of the Banco Nacional de México, held the top position. Noetzlin and his associates, who were all French Jews, were members of a French banking firm that held tremendous assets in Holland and Switzerland. Several private French bankers, including the group who came to Mexico, had

pooled their resources in order to organize the Société Financière Pour L'Industrie Au Mexique as a firm strong enough to compete with the dominant Rothschild organization.⁸

Early in the first administration of President Díaz his top advisers had noted that "the country was well launched into a railroad building era that demanded powerful capitalists and credit institutions. . . . but the credit of the country as well as its government was null." The Mexican government then began the policy of granting concessions and special stimuli to encourage local and foreign investors to establish "a great private bank of emission, deposit, and discount in Mexico." In 1881 the government of President Manuel González signed a contract with Eduardo Noetzlin authorizing him to establish the National Bank as a credit institution to fulfill the capital needs of Mexican private investors as well as of the Mexican government.⁹ Since the President's advisers

⁸ Fernando Rosenzweig, "La industria," in Historia moderna de México. El Porfiriato: La vida económica, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1965), p. 460. Cf. Jan Bazant, Historia de la deuda exterior de México (1823-1946) (México: El Colegio de México, 1968), p. 92.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 803-804. Jews in Mexican finance were not a novelty. In fact, the very first loan to the Mexican Republic was made by the B. A. Goldschmidt Company of London in 1824, and this firm continued to do business with the Mexican government through the periods of the French Intervention and the Empire (Bazant, pp. 25-27). The Jewish banker from Switzerland, Juan Baptiste Jecker, made a loan at a very high interest rate to the government of General Miramón which Juárez repudiated when he became President in 1861. The repudiation of the debt was partially responsible for the French Intervention, and as a result, the Jecker name is not mentioned except in the ugliest terms in Mexico (Ibid., pp. 90-91). By 1904 Mexican loans were no longer a high risk, but were a very

believed that credit to the government was more important than credit to private industry, the real purpose of the Bank would be to serve as an arm of the Treasury Department. The National Bank, with its European assets, had the capital to act as the credit instrument of the Treasury, making long term (and, after 1908, short term also) loans to the Government. By 1910 the Bank held a majority of outstanding bonds as well as interests in several Mexican companies including Buen Tono (cigars and cigarettes), Cervecería Montezuma (beer), and Compañía Nacional de Dinamita y Explosivos.¹⁰

The name of Edouard Noetzlin, the key figure in french financial arrangements with Mexico, was a well-known figure among French Jewry. After the establishment of the National Bank he returned to France to head the Paris office of the organization, leaving in charge in Mexico several associates, all of whom were French Jews. Several of these men had business interests in Mexico outside of the Bank.

For example, Paul Cretenier, Vice President of the Societe Financière, was a partner with Eugene Mannheim in a

desirable investment, and the Mexican bond issue was awarded over French competition to the firm of Speyer Brothers of New York, London, and Frankfort at the low rate of 4 percent. Limantour, the Secretary of the Treasury and financial wizard of the Porfiriato, considered this the outstanding achievement of his career because it enabled the Mexican government to buy the controlling interest in the Mexican Railroad system. (José Yves Limantour, Apuntes sobre mi vida pública: 1892-1911 [México: Editorial Porrúa, 1965], pp. 85-86).

¹⁰ Rosenzweig, p. 461. Cf. José C. Valadés, El Porfirismo (México: Editorial Patria, 1948), I, 233.

large import-export firm, as well as a member of the administrative boards of several companies in which the Bank held interests.¹¹ Daniel Levy, who received a large commission as one of the investors in the Bank, had come to Mexico as the representative of an English paper firm and a French wine and cognac house. A few years later he purchased a tract of land near Oaxaca where he planned to establish a great modern tobacco plantation which would employ the latest techniques recommended by the Paris Tobacco Institute. As his labor force, Levy planned to employ a colony of foreign workers, probably Russian Jews. Like the many projects which would be suggested regarding settling Russian Jews in Mexico, Daniel Levy's plans never materialized.¹²

The Tron Brothers, Jules, Joseph, and Henri were also members of the Advisory Council of the Bank. Their main business in Mexico, however, was the construction and operation of El Palacio del Hierro (now Mexican owned and operated and still one of the leading department stores in the country). The department store had the distinction of being the first building in Mexico to be constructed entirely of steel, and as such, was a proud sign of the progress of modern Mexico. A second unique feature of El Palacio was the "fixed price," an innovation in the Mexico of 1891 that to this date is limited almost to the department stores.¹³

¹¹ Auguste Genin, Les francais au mexique de XVI siecle à nos jours (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Argo, 1933), pp. 304-305.

¹² Ibid., pp. 514-515.

¹³ Ibid., p. 431.

The most important man at the National Bank was Hugo Scherer, another Alsatian Jew. Scherer headed the Mexican office of the Bank, and also served as the consul general to the Persian government. Although Scherer (like the other men mentioned) was known simply as a Frenchman to his friends and associates in business and government, he never denied his religion. He was recognized as one of the leading Jews in Mexico in 1904, the year that formally organized services were first held, but Scherer did not attend the services.¹⁴ The Scherer sons were educated in Europe, married upper class Mexican women, and raised their children as Catholics. Eventually the entire family left Mexico to return to their home in France.¹⁵ The pattern of the personal history of the Scherer family was repeated in the lives of several other Alsatian Jews who lived and worked in Mexico.

The Hauser and Zivy families provide another example. In 1864 Hauser and Zivy opened La Esmeralda, the largest and most beautiful jewelry store in Mexico, on Calle de San Francisco. A few years later David Zivy established on the same street a shop called La Parisienne, well known for the crystal and glassware that furnished Mexico's finest homes.¹⁶ The Zivy family also operated the restaurant in the Hotel

¹⁴ Victor Harris, The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p. 34.

¹⁵ Interview with Rubén Mazal (Mexico), December 5, 1969.

¹⁶ J. Figueroa Domenech, Guía general descriptiva de la República mexicana, Tomo Primero, El Distrito Federal (México and Barcelona: Ramón de S. N. Araluse, 1899), p. 155.

Iturbide, a favorite eating spot among Mexican political figures. Here guests were seated at marble topped tables manufactured by another Zivy enterprise, a furniture factory.¹⁷ By 1905 when the American journalist Victor Harris visited Mexico, Hauser and the elder Zivy had returned to France, and the jewelry store was operated by relatives from Alsace, the Bloch brothers.¹⁸ The Bloch family lived in Mexico for many years, first operating the jewelry business and later two fine fashion stores. The Bloch children were sent to school in Europe, and eventually most of the family returned to France.¹⁹

In addition to these Alsatian Jews, another banker of French Jewish origin had reached the top circles of Mexican society. Even in this very "in" position as an officer of the most exclusive club in Mexico, Luis Lavie is referred to by one of the foremost historians of the Porfirian period as "a foreigner and a banker" who was frequently seen "at the fashionable Jockey Club" where the elite of Mexican politics and society met for "cards, conversation, and steam baths."²⁰ At the time that Lavie held the office of Vocale of the Jockey Club, José Yves Limantour, the financial genius of the Díaz government and the son of French Jews, was the President of the Club. In 1896 when Limantour presided over

¹⁷ Valadés, El Porfirismo, II, 40. See also Figueroa Domenech, p. 288.

¹⁸ Harris, pp. 33 and 53.

¹⁹ Interview with Rubén Mazal.

²⁰ Valadés, II, 37.

a special junta authorized to increase the pure water supply of the city, he appointed Luis Lavie to the Board of Directors of the sanitation project.²¹

In contrast to these successful bankers in Mexico is the sad story of Pedro Boesch, also a Frenchman from Alsace. Like Noetzlin, Boesch first took part in Mexican government financing during the presidential term of Manuel González. A wealthy merchant of Matamoros and Tamaulipas, Boesch advanced the pay of the federal troops stationed at Tamaulipas "with considerable personal loss since the government repaid him in bonds." The paths of Noetzlin and Boesch diverge from this point, for while Noetzlin's career as head of the National Bank spanned the entire Porfiriato and brought him wealth and honor, Boesch's luck went from bad to worse. Finally despondent over his worthless bonds, unhonored government claims, and the ultimate humiliation of government proceedings against him which attached his property to Pedro Boesch "blew his brains out on the Paseo." His suicide left four children, all in school. In the fashion of the French who lived in Mexico, his eldest son was at college in England, while his only daughter was a student at the Dublán Institute, and two younger boys were enrolled at the Lycée Fournier.²²

²¹ "Junta directiva del saneamiento de la Ciudad de México - 1896." Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana, Ramo del Gobierno, No. 1271.

²² The Mexican Herald, April 26, 1896.

These French Jews from Alsace were the very ones closest to the government and the upper class of Mexico. They were very modern assimilated Jews, and most of them were not at all religious. They understood the anti-religious philosophy of Mexico which viewed organized religion as something for women and the lower classes. They also seem to have understood and adopted for themselves the individualism of Mexican liberalism. Their very success and acceptance had proved that as an individual a Jew could make a successful life in Mexico. However, they felt that as a group they might stimulate the antipathy or disdain of the government, and perhaps the hatred of a populace which could easily be aroused by a hostile Church. When Rabbi Martin Zielonka came to investigate the situation of the Jews in Mexico City in 1908, he could not understand this attitude, because in Mexico " . . .there is more mingling of peoples of different faiths and no faith than in any city of similar size in our country."²³ The rabbi's observation only demonstrates a characteristic often noted among Mexicans: they can be xenophobic in the extreme, expressing outright hatred toward an outside group, and yet have the closest friendship with a member of the group they hate.

There is another possible explanation for the apathy of the Alsatians to any Jewish community organization. These

²³ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite (Cincinnati), July 16, 1908.

Jews considered themselves Frenchmen, and France was their home. Indeed Rabbi Zielonka, with a German pride that he did not bother to disguise, remarked, "These Alsatians seem never to have heard of the Franco-Prussian War."²⁴ The French Jews were exceptions to the general truism that the Jew, in any country to which he migrates, is the only foreigner without a homeland.²⁵ The history of the Jew has been concentrated on emigration. As a result, in any country in which he finds himself, the Jew has been the paradigm of accommodation, creating institutions to fill his needs while he adapts his own character to the national character of the country.

The Jews from Alsace do not fall into this category. They were Frenchmen, and they had a homeland - France. As they made their fortunes or concluded their business in Mexico, many of them returned to France, sometimes leaving sons or other relatives to carry on the Mexican business. This pattern is illustrated in the experiences of the Scherer, Zivy, and Bloch families. Although many Jews became naturalized citizens of Mexico during the Porfiriato, of the prominent men from Alsace, "D. Bloch" is the only one whose name appears in the list of naturalized Mexican citizens.²⁶ Others, who stayed in Mexico and whose descendants still live there, to this day (1970) consider themselves Frenchmen.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gerhardt Schmidt, "Los extranjeros," trans. Angela Muller Montiel, Revista Mexicana de Sociología, VIII (México, 1946), 345.

²⁶ Cartas de Naturalización.

Why then even include the story of the French Jews in Mexico if they contributed nothing toward the development of a Jewish community? For one reason, their very role as a negative force is significant. The fact that the leading Jews in the country had no interest in a Jewish community certainly deterred any organization, for the majority of the Jews in the country accepted the judgment and followed the example of the wealthiest and most prominent.

On the other hand these men were Jews and never denied their religion. It seems likely that like their coreligionists living in comfortable circumstances in other countries where they enjoyed religious freedom, they too were involved to some extent in the search for solutions to the problems facing the Jews of eastern Europe. The period of time when men such as Scherer, Zivy, and Bloch were in Mexico coincided with the beginnings of the mass emigration of Russian Jews which dated from the first of the czarist supported pogroms in 1881.²⁷ As thousands of Jews attempted to leave Russia and crossed into the border towns of Austrian Galicia, committees of concerned Jews in all the liberated countries of the western world - England, Germany, France, and the United States - met to collect money for the relief of the beleaguered Russians, and to try to help them find a secure haven somewhere in the world. The United States was the most obvious answer, but could the United States absorb them all? It seemed impossible.

²⁷ Wischnitzer, p. 37.

So plans for colonies in Palestine multiplied, as well as projects for colonies in South Africa, Australia, South America, and even Mexico.²⁸ It seems unlikely that the wealthy Alsatians in Mexico could have remained completely uninvolved. Most likely, they were willing to help as long as they could do so anonymously, just as they were willing in later years to contribute financially to Jewish needs in Mexico as long as their names were not publicly connected with Jewish affairs.²⁹

The prominent Jews from England did not share the reticence of their French coreligionists. One of these was Ernest Cassel, whose business in Mexico was as a financier of the Mexican railroad system. Cassel was a mutual friend of both the European philanthropist, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, and of Jacob Schiff, the President of the New York banking firm, Kuhn, Loeb, and Company. Schiff's firm participated with Speyer Brothers, another Jewish firm, in the financial reorganization of the Mexican railroad building program in the 1890's.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁹ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite, July 16, 1908. This point is also mentioned in the Report of Henry Goulston to the I.R.O. dated July 1921 in "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau Correspondence of Martin Zielonka and others in connection with Jewish immigration into Mexico," 3 vols. microfilm, AJA. Rabbi Zielonka's papers, reports, and letters relating to his work and that of the B'nai B'rith organization in Mexico were donated to the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati by Rabbi Zielonka's son, Rabbi David Zielonka of Tampa, Florida.

³⁰ Luis Nicolau D'Olwer, "Las inversiones extranjeras," in Historia moderna. El Porfiriato: La vida económica, p. 1012.

In their personal and business correspondence, which lasted from 1880 until Cassel's death in 1914, Jacob Schiff and Ernest Cassel discussed family matters, railroad and financial affairs, investment opportunities in Mexico, and the possibility of settling Russian Jews in a colony on Mexican territory.³¹ In 1891 Jacob Schiff, through his friend Cassel, contacted Baron Maurice de Hirsch, the European philanthropist who was to establish some seventeen colonies in Argentina. Schiff suggested that the plateau country of Mexico might be an excellent place to colonize Russian Jews. Not only was the land comparable to that of Argentina, "but Mexico was so much closer that colonization would be easier to supervise."³² Baron Hirsch encouraged an investigation of the Mexican possibilities which Schiff supervised. After several months and many letters, the project was dropped.³³

At about the same time the Samuels family of London also expressed interest in establishing colonies of Russian Jews in Mexico. In 1887 a meeting was held at the Mexico City home of Lionel Samuel where the project was first suggested.³⁴ Although the Mexican government expressed its

³¹ Cyrus Adler, Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), I, 200-205, and II, 91-93.

³² Letter from Jacob Schiff to Ernest Cassel, June 9, 1891, in "Jacob Schiff Papers," Cyrus Adler, trustee, AJA, microfilm roll 714.

³³ Adler, Jacob H. Schiff, II, 93.

³⁴ New York Times, February 13, 1887, p. 1.

willingness to accept five thousand Russian Jews and to aid with the immigration, the Samuels, like Baron Hirsch, decided against the project.³⁵ In spite of the adverse decisions (which will be discussed in a later chapter), these events illustrate the interest of both the British and American Jews in the plight of the unfortunate Russians, and their cooperative efforts to help the unhappy situation.

Aside from the Jewish men whose names were internationally recognized, many others came to Mexico during the early years of the Porfiriato. They came as merchants, as representatives of American, German, and British firms, and even as small manufacturers. The list of patents of privileges granted in 1895 indicates the variety of enterprises in which Jewish businessmen were involved. For example, the government granted a patent to Emil Schoenfelder for the preparation of a special photographic paper; to Siegfried Silberberg for an improved printing machine; to Jules Sanger for the development of an apparatus to dry and cool cement; and to Julio Meyer for a new kind of belt for men's trousers.³⁶ Incidentally, Mr. Meyer proved to be the chief support of the Mexican Jewish community a few years later. Businessmen were also granted the privilege of exclusive distribution of name brand merchandise in Mexico. Among others, these concessions

³⁵ Der Israelite (1891), p. 1285. Cited in "Collection of Gotthard Deutsch," AJA.

³⁶ Anuario Estadístico 1895 (México: Dirección de Estadística, 1896), pp. 53-59.

were granted to Emil Ketelson for Diamonte Soap and Listerine, and to Edward Porter for Hiram Walker and a few other brands of whiskey.³⁷

During the first half of the Díaz regime Jewish entrepreneurs were beginning successful careers in Mexican mining and railroads. Samuel Lederer, a Hungarian who had settled in Mexico after a few years in the United States, had received an important mining concession and had become a Mexican citizen by 1890, while the Guggenheims, who would in a few years virtually control smelting operations in Mexico, were just making the contacts for their first government contract.³⁸ Roberto Symon, an associate of Ernest Cassel, was successfully engaged in the construction of the northern line of the Mexican Central Railroad, and, in partnership with Livingston Gordon, opened the Banco Occidental, the principal bank in Mazatlán.³⁹

To be purely objective, Jews were not pouring into Mexico, but neither were non-Jewish immigrants coming to Mexico in appreciable numbers. Mexican government publications and newspapers consistently lamented the fact that so few immigrants came to Mexico while the United States and

³⁷ Anuario Estadístico 1894 (1895), pp. 218-219.

³⁸ Cartas de Naturalización. Cf. Harvey O'Connor, The Guggenheims: The Making of an American Dynasty (New York: Covici-Friede, 1928), p. 95.

³⁹ Valadés, I, 241-242.

Argentina enjoyed the benefits of thousands of productive newcomers each year.⁴⁰

Although small, the Jewish population of Mexico City was quite visible as Jewish businesses lined the main streets of the city. The shops operated by Zivy, the Diener Brothers, Schrieber, Sommer, Bloch, Grossman, and Jacob monopolized the jewelry business on Calle de San Francisco. In the decorative housewares business, a store owned by the Loeb brothers competed with David Zivy's La Parisienne.⁴¹ Several men who would participate in the first formal Jewish organizations in the early twentieth century were established in business before 1899. Julio Meyer, the inventor of the better belt, operated a men's haberdashery; J. Assael was the proprietor of the Hotel Opera on Calle 5 de Mayo; Dr. L. B. Speyer was a practicing dentist; and Dr. Sidney Ulfelder was one of four Jewish physicians listed in the General Directory.⁴² Granat and Horowitz operated a store which advertised the unlikely combination of dry goods and antiquities; Simon Weil was a silversmith whose shop also featured silks and cashmeres; and Mr. Wolfenstein was a professional photographer with a studio

⁴⁰ Moisés González Navarro, La colonización en México 1877-1910 (México: El Colegio de México, 1960), p. 87. See also El Financiero Mexicana, September 18, October 6 and 13, 1888.

⁴¹ Figueroa Domenech, pp. 256-329, and Germania (Mexico), September 8, 1888.

⁴² Figueroa Domenech, p. 288. Others listed in "Directorio general domiciliario México," published as an appendix to Figueroa Domenech.

on one of the principal streets of the city.⁴³ Indeed, it seemed to one casual observer in 1890 that "The city of Mexico is overrun with Jewish merchants of all degrees."⁴⁴

Two of the Jewish merchants from Europe, Samson Heller and David Zivy, advertised their shops in a Jewish periodical published for a few months by the Mexican born Jew, Francisco Rivas.⁴⁵ The wording of the advertisement for La Parisienne is of particular interest, for David Zivy announced the arrival of a supply of prayer books and glasses for holy water as well as marble, bronze, and porcelain objects of art, paintings, and French perfumes. This notice appeared in the single edition of El Sábado Secreto, the very first paper published by Rivas, and the only one of the fifteen editions published under various titles to carry the notice that the periodical would circulate "only among Israelitas."⁴⁶ That Zivy advertised religious items in a Jewish paper suggests that although there was no formal Jewish congregation in the city, religious observance was probably carried on quietly and privately in Jewish homes.

The Jewish population of Mexico, by all indications, increased considerably during the last quarter of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, The Guggenheims, p. 94.

⁴⁵ "D. Zivy," El Sábado Secreto, February 9, 1889 and La Luz de Sábado, February 23, 1889 and "Samson Heller," El Sábado, April 27 through July 15, 1889.

⁴⁶ El Sábado Secreto, February 9, 1889.

nineteenth century. Accurate statistics do not exist, and those that are available list only the country of origin of the foreigner in Mexico and not his religion. The only official documentation is the list of letters of naturalization issued to new citizens of Mexico. Since the majority of foreigners who came to Mexico did not become citizens, this list represents but a small proportion of the newcomers.

In spite of these shortcomings, the Cartas de Naturalización demonstrates a steadily increasing Jewish population throughout the period of the Porfiriato. The number of naturalized Mexican citizens with Jewish names during the first fourteen years of Porfirian rule (1877-1890) was more than double the number recorded during the fourteen years of the Empire and the Restored Republic (1862-1876). While only twenty-two probably Jewish names appear for the earlier period, there are forty-seven such names from 1877 to 1890. Thirty-one more names of Jewish men were added to the list between 1891 and 1899 for a total of seventy-eight.⁴⁷

The country of origin of these seventy-eight naturalized Mexican citizens is illustrated in Figure 1.

⁴⁷ Cartas de Naturalización.

Figure 1.

Country of origin of naturalized Mexican
citizens of probable Jewish origin: 1877-1899.⁴⁸

Country of origin	Number	Percentage of total
Germany	45	57.7
United States	10	12.8
France	9	11.5
Austria	6	7.7
Other countries	8	10.3
Total	78	100.0

The German immigration was very popular in Mexico.

In fact, the hard working German was the immigrant preferred by the Mexicans whose goal was the economic development of their country.⁴⁹

In order not to exaggerate the importance or the size of the Jewish population in Mexico, it is appropriate to remind the reader that the number of Jews in Mexico was really very small. According to the census of 1895, 99.09 percent of the Mexican population professed Catholicism as their religion, and of the non-Catholic population, only 0.13 percent professed Judaism. Although the proportion of Jews in the non-Catholic population of Mexico increased to 0.24 percent in 1900 and to 0.31 percent in 1910, these statistics (admittedly inaccurate) remind the reader that the Jews were

⁴⁸ Ibid. Author's calculations of percentages.

⁴⁹ El Monitor Republicano, January 14, 1883 and El Financiero Mexicano, October 15, 1888. See also Warren Schiff, "The Germans in Mexican Trade and Industry During the Díaz Period," The Americas, XXIII (January, 1967), 292-293.

a very small, almost infinitesimal fraction of the total population of Mexico.⁵⁰

In spite of their small numbers, Jewish men did participate in just about every phase of the business and industrial life of Mexico. There were Jews in Mexico outside of the strictly business field who were important, not for their wealth or family connections or social position, but because they were in a position to influence public opinion. Some of these men were editors, writers, and publishers of periodicals in Mexico; others were educators; a few were active in both education and publishing. No attempt will be made here to evaluate these men in order of importance, but the following examples suggest the extent to which a few Jewish men were involved in shaping public opinion in Mexico.

Simon Levy edited El Financiero Mexicano, The Mexican Financier, a weekly journal in Spanish and English that concentrated on subjects related to "banking, finance, railroads, agriculture, mining, and commerce in the Republic of Mexico." As one would expect in a journal printed for industrialists and businessmen, the chief interest of El Financiero Mexicano was the economic development of Mexico. Aside from articles concerning developments in specific industries, every single issue of 1887 and 1888 included

⁵⁰ México. Secretaría de Economía, Estadísticas sociales del Porfiriato: 1877-1910 (México: Dirección General de Estadística, 1956), pp. 127 and 129.

an article about immigration. The attitude of the paper was consistent. The main theme was necesitamos brazos (Mexico needed arms).⁵¹ In February 1887 the paper announced a proposed project to establish a colony of Russian Jews in Mexico. El Financiero asked only one question. Would these immigrants make good farmers and would they contribute to the agricultural development of Mexico? There was absolutely no other question to consider, and certainly, as far as this paper was concerned, the least important information about the proposed colonists was their religion.⁵² This positivist viewpoint which based its judgment strictly on the material implications of the project was applied in exactly the same manner to Chinese and Mormon immigration. If the Chinese and Mormons would help to fulfill Mexico's greatest need, then by all means, let them come. In 1896 El Financiero Mexicano changed its format to become exclusively a scientific and industrial journal and did less editorializing in its more limited scope as El Financiero Mexicano Y Gaceta Científica Industrial Y Agrícola.

French Jews were also active in publishing periodicals in Mexico, and according to their German competitors had a great deal of influence. Among the French journalists, Max Athenosy published L'Echo Francais from 1884.⁵³ In the field

⁵¹ El Financiero Mexicano, October 13, 1888, December 8, 1888, plus many other issues through 1895.

⁵² Ibid., February 4, 1887

⁵³ Auguste Genin, Vers pour la France (México: Franco-Mexicana, S. A., 1918), p. XIV.

of education, Felix Weill was the director of the Lycée Francaise in Mexico City from 1896 to 1899.⁵⁴

German pedagogy was very influential in the development of Mexican public education. Most prominent among the German educators were Enrique Rebsamen, the Director of the Normal School at Jalapa, and Enrique Laubscher, and among their colleagues were Jewish pedagogues. Articles on the application of German teaching methods in Mexican primary schools were published in Mexican journals by J. Katzenstein, while Otto Salomon was an early advocate of training in manual skills as an integral part of public education.⁵⁵ As early as 1843 one Julio Meyer operated an Academy of Calligraphy in Mexico City.⁵⁶ The name of Julio Meyer (the man who held the Jewish community together) will appear again as a leader in Jewish life at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it is impossible to be certain of any relationship.

The failure of the revolutions of 1848 in Germany had motivated many German liberals to leave their homeland, and a small but active group came to make their homes in Mexico. Among this group was Isidoro Epstein.

⁵⁴ Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, VII, 434.

⁵⁵ Marianne O. de Bopp, Contribución al estudio de las letras alemanes en México (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1961), p. 276. See also Francisco Larroya, Historia comparada de la educación en México (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1952), p. 248.

⁵⁶ Bopp, p. 351.

If one traveled the length and breadth of Mexico searching for one man to serve as a model for the foreigner best suited to think and act as a Mexican positivist, the German Jewish publisher and statistician, Isidoro Epstein, would be the ideal choice. Epstein arrived in Mexico in 1851 and had become a citizen by 1856. His education at a Polytechnic school and at the University of Marburg had prepared him for a career in mathematics and statistics. He was a German liberal in politics, but a positivist in the sense that he believed material development must be the goal of government and individual actions. His earliest activities in Mexico were in Aguascalientes where he prepared a detailed map of the city and state to be used as a basis for development plans. At the same time he taught mathematics and German at the Literary Institute of the city.⁵⁷

Epstein's interest in the development of his adopted country is evidenced in his early periodicals. El Atalaya in 1874 urged the development of railroads through the interior of Mexico as the best means to modernize the people, to bring European colonists, and to improve the well being and happiness of the population. "The railroad line is the new blood that modern civilization injects into the social

⁵⁷ Isidoro Epstein, "Algo para la historia del periodismo en México," Germania (México), June 21, 1890. This article is an autobiographical sketch of the publisher. His Mexican citizenship is confirmed by the Cartas de Naturalización.

body to invigorate it and give it greater development," wrote Epstein, as it "brings the interior into the world market."⁵⁸

Epstein was more than a propagandist in favor of developing the country; he was an active builder as well. In 1878 he acquired the concession to construct and operate an urban railroad from the city of Zacatecas to Guadalupe, formed the necessary company, and supervised the building of the line.⁵⁹ He probably had colonization in mind, for in 1883 Epstein signed a contract with the government to establish a German agricultural colony in Mexico. The contract, however, was cancelled a few days later, with no reason given to the public.⁶⁰

Epstein published his first periodical in Zacatecas in 1864, and by the time he settled in Mexico City in 1870, he had also edited papers in Monterrey and in San Antonio, Texas. In 1872 Epstein founded Vorwärts, the first journal to be published in the German language in Mexico. The name itself, translated Adelante in Spanish and Forward in English, is indicative of the progressive political views of its publisher. The periodical of the Social Democratic party in Leipzig had the same title.⁶¹ When Vorwärts first appeared, the German

⁵⁸ El Atalaya (México), July 13, 1874.

⁵⁹ Germania, June 21, 1890.

⁶⁰ El Monitor Republicano, January 14 and January 21, 1883.

⁶¹ Marianne O. de Bopp, "El periodismo alemán en México," Historia Mexicana, IX (México: El Colegio de México April-June 1960), 558-559.

colony in Mexico was still very small but was growing rapidly. While there were less than two hundred members in 1870, by 1891 the German population had increased to fifteen hundred.⁶²

Epstein intended his paper to be the voice of the German colony and in this role Vorwarts defended the German claim to Alsace-Lorraine in a polemic carried out with the French periodical, Trait d'Union. In his general political views, however, Epstein was too liberal for many of his compatriots. For example, he angered a number of members of the German colony by his opposition to the appointment of a conservative general as Mexican Ambassador to Germany. Statements appeared in El Monitor Republicano which attacked Epstein and denied that he spoke for the German colony. In 1875 one Maurice Rahden established another German paper, Deutsche Wacht, presumably to counteract Epstein.⁶³ Soon Epstein stopped competing, as Vorwarts suspended publication in 1876. Incidentally, Epstein published the Spanish language periodical El Atalaya concurrently with Vorwarts, and his press remained active after the suspension of both papers. He published translations of German literary works into Spanish, a translation of a fictional biography of Alexander Von Humboldt (which he dedicated to the prominent Mexican liberal writer, Ignacio Ramirez), and a magazine for young women entitled El Eco de Ambos Mundos. The emancipation of

⁶² Ibid., p. 558.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 559.

women was a popular liberal issue, and Epstein wrote articles favoring education and equal opportunity for women in this periodical and in his later journal, Germania.⁶⁴

The Epstein press also printed El Precursor, the anti-clerical journal edited by the men who were at the forefront of the liberal and then positivist movement of the country: Antonio Martínez del Romero, Ignacio Altimirano, Ignacio Ramírez, and Justo Sierra.⁶⁵ The journal attacked the clergy without mercy, and to some extent the foolishness of all religious belief. Epstein's contributions to the periodical included an article entitled, "Our Planet," which was a Darwinian presentation of the evolution of life on earth which satirically denied the biblical story of creation. A similar feature was a mock conversation about Adam and Eve and the physical hardship on poor Eve who must have given birth to thousands in order to populate the earth.⁶⁶ Epstein participated in the publication and management of two other German periodicals, El Correo Germánico and Deutsche Wacht in the 1870's.⁶⁷ Not until 1888 did he establish another periodical under his sole direction. In the years between publications, his work included scientific statistical writing and teaching.

⁶⁴ Bopp, Contribución a las letras alemanas, pp. 231-214 and 316.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 232-233. Also El Precursor (Aguascalientes, 1874).

⁶⁶ El Precursor, March 15, 1875, p. 349.

⁶⁷ Bopp, loc. cit., p. 233.

In 1870 Epstein published a major statistical work entitled Cuadro sinóptico estadística universal which was commissioned by the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics, of which the author had been a member since 1856. The book was a sort of world almanac including all kinds of data on every country of the world - area, population, government, imports and exports, national debt, paper money, weights, measures, miles of railroad track, and just about anything that could be measured. Although almost no personal information is available about Isidoro Epstein, it is obvious that modesty was not one of his qualities. He advertised his book in every periodical that he published, calling it a "must" for the desk or library of every educated man, and he assured his readers that he was not exaggerating or overpraising his work.⁶⁸

Another major work was a treatise in the field of applied mechanics which was adopted as an official text by the Colegio Militar and was awarded a silver medal at the Paris Exhibition in 1889. This was a two volume work which included 250 illustrations and charts. Epstein was named Professor of Rational Mechanics at the Colegio Militar in 1881, and later taught the Applied Mechanics Course based on his own text for six consecutive years.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ El Atalaya, June 5, 1874 and subsequent issues; Germania (1888-1894).

⁶⁹ Germania, June 21, 1890.

The Colegio Militar, located in Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, played a significant role in the development of the Mexican Army. Between 1872 and 1897, 1,186 officers were graduated from the institution. To Mexican liberals, the army fuero had been almost as much a symbol of Spain and the evils of corporate power as the Church. The director of the college, Juan Villegas, through his careful selection of textbooks, is given credit for running a school that trained officers without creating a military caste.⁷⁰ If the liberal Epstein was an example of the faculty that Villegas hired, this could be just as decisive a reason for the success of the school in limiting army power.

Epstein's teaching career began in Aguascalientes in the early 1850's and extended to Zacatecas, Monterrey, and the military college at Mexico City where he taught from 1881 until about 1889. He published journals from Zacatecas to San Antonio, Texas to Mexico City, in a publishing career that lasted from 1864 until his death in 1894. His last periodical, Germania, published from 1888 to 1894, was his most important. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the German colony numbered over 1,500 people, and of the ten foreign periodicals printed in Mexico City, only Germania represented the Germans.⁷¹ This periodical seemed more German in its interests and intent than his earlier publications,

⁷⁰ Valadés, I, 65.

⁷¹ Bopp, "El periodismo alemán," p. 567.

probably reflecting both the heightened German nationalism of the period and Epstein's conscious effort to win the support of the German colony.

Epstein was both German nationalist and Jew, confronted with the problem of defending his loyalty to a Germany which was growing more racist and anti-semitic in its nationalism. From his participation in the anti-religious review, El Precursor, in 1875 and 1876, it should be safe to assume that Epstein was an atheist. He was still, however, a Jew by heritage and he took every opportunity in his journal, Germania, to attack anti-semitism and to prove that the German government took no part in it. He never used the terms "constitution" or "freedom of conscience" or "religious tolerance" or "individual rights" in his arguments, nor did he argue by placing any value upon Jewish culture or the Jewish religion.

Since personal opinion had no place in the positivist scheme, Epstein did not write his opinions in the first person, nor did he editorialize his beliefs. Instead, he printed in Germania any material he could find which would prove empirically the correctness of his liberal personal views. His arguments were those of a positivist; they were empirical demonstrations that proved three hypotheses;

1. The German government was not anti-semitic.
2. Scientifically there was no basis for racial anti-semitism.
3. Jews did not commit ritual murder.

For example, Epstein printed in full a debate that had taken place in the Prussian Landtag in which an anti-semitic speaker was refuted by three liberal deputies. The empirical conclusion to be drawn was that three out of four German deputies stood firmly against anti-semitism.⁷²

The articles which were intended to combat anti-semitism consistently applied a single argument. Each offered "proof" that there was no scientific basis for anti-Jewish manifestations. One article entitled "Die Juden ein Mischvolk" cited the findings of a German physical anthropologist to disprove the racial argument for anti-semitism. One anthropologist claimed to have proved that the Jews were a mixed race more closely related to the Armenian than to the Semitic peoples. The obvious conclusion was that since Jews are not Semites, no scientific basis exists for anti-semitism.⁷³

In his attempt to apply scientific method to the cultural phenomenon of human prejudice, Isidoro Epstein carried the pseudoscientific philosophy of positivism to the point of the ridiculous. It is well to remember, however, that there was a strong current of European and American thought which accepted the premise that any and every "truth" could be demonstrated empirically. Comte, the French father of positivism, stressed in his writings the necessity of a spiritual power in society, and attempted to prove the

⁷² Germania, April 30, 1892.

⁷³ Ibid., September 10, 1892.

scientific truth of his "religion of progress" with empirical arguments.⁷⁴ In the United States the philosophy of Social Darwinism was accepted as "truth" not only by the industrialists whose accumulation of capital it justified, but by the intellectual community led by Yale University. Social Darwinism attempted to transfer the principle of evolution described by Charles Darwin to explain social phenomena such as social class and economic success or failure. The theory thus relieved business and government of any responsibility to improve the lot of the working classes who had "proved" their inferiority by their inability to achieve.⁷⁵ The work of Isidoro Epstein provides another example of the attempt to apply scientific method in order to arrive at scientific answers to social problems.

Epstein deplored the anti-semitic refusal of the city of Dusseldorf to erect a statue of the German poet, Heine, because he happened to be Jewish. Epstein's empirical argument in this case was simply that Heine had earned the honor of a memorial in his native city through his contribution to German letters, and that anti-semitism, a manifestation of hatred with no scientific basis "had robbed Heine of his rightful monument."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Robert A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 228, referring to Comte, The Positive Polity, Vol. II (Paris, 1854-1857).

⁷⁵ That positivism was intended to serve class interest in Mexico is suggested by Leopold Zea, "Positivism and Porfirism," p. 177.

⁷⁶ Bopp, Contribución a las letras alemanas, p. 255.

The charge of ritual murder was an ugly side effect of anti-semitism, and Epstein found empirical demonstrations to refute these charges in the work of such diverse authorities as Pope Innocent VI, Martin Luther, and Ernest Renan.⁷⁷

Fighting anti-semitism was only one of Epstein's many interests. His periodical covered topics which showed the full range of his interests as well as topics which specifically pertained to the German colony.⁷⁸ As for Mexican politics, Epstein warned of the danger of the rising influence of the Ultra-montane (the extreme Catholic conservative) Party.⁷⁹ Epstein had long been interested in the emancipation of women. He reported the admission of a woman to a German university, and he wrote an amusing evaluation of the Mexican woman as seen through the eyes of a European. The Mexican woman had many virtues, according to Epstein, but the one vice of smoking cigars.⁸⁰ He crusaded against bull fighting, and suggested in its place the "combat of flowers."⁸¹

Epstein for many years had done meteorological observation. In 1874 the government had decreed the establishment of a meteorological observatory in the School of Medicine

⁷⁷ Germania, July 11, 1891.

⁷⁸ Bopp, Contribución a las letras alemanes, p. 315.

⁷⁹ "Die Ultramontanen in Mexiko," Germania, December 15, 1888.

⁸⁰ Bopp, loc. cit., p. 316.

⁸¹ "A El Monitor Republicano," Germania, January 21, 1893.

so that students might apply atmospheric science to medicine. According to the report of the Secretary of Development, for the entire year of 1875 "Señor Isidoro Epstein practiced daily observations in the capital at 7 a.m., 2 p.m., and 9 p.m., and graphically represented the results."⁸² In 1892 an analytical article in Germania analyzed the results of years of observations in the Mexico City observatory and, based on the findings, made predictions for the future climate of Mexico.⁸³

Epstein also recognized an article entitled "Jews of the New World" published by Francisco Rivas in the Boletín of the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics. The article, which analyzed the origins of the words spoken by Columbus' sailors and recorded by his interpreter, was translated into German and printed in Germania. Epstein added a few words of praise for the Mexican Jew who was his colleague in the Society which published the article. The positivist German Jew praised the excellent use of his data and careful application of the science of philology which provided empiric proof that Jews and Moors had accompanied Columbus on his momentous voyage of discovery.⁸⁴

⁸² México. Anales de Ministerio de Fomento, III (México: Secretaría de Fomento, 1877), 10.

⁸³ "Algunas prognosticaciones," Germania September 17, 1892.

⁸⁴ Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, "Los Judíos en el Nuevo Mundo," Boletín de La Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía Y Estadística, Cuarta Epoca, Tomo II (1891), 202-204. Translated into German and printed in Germania, September 26, 1891. R. J. H. Gottheil in "Columbus in Jewish Literature," AJHS, II (1894), 129-137 presents a similar linguistic analysis.

Isidoro Epstein had been an active member of the Society of Geography and Statistics since 1856, and an honored member since 1870. He contributed to the Boletín until the year of his death. In 1893 Epstein published an article on public health entitled "La mortalidad en México," in which he charted the mortality statistics of Mexico City from 1867 to 1891 and offered an explanation for the discouraging figures. Inadequate housing, poor sanitation, lack of medical care, and such practices as keeping dead bodies in the house for long periods before burial all were to blame. Epstein proposed a ten point program to improve the health of the city's population which included the construction of moderately priced housing for workers complete with good ventilation and modern sanitation facilities. He suggested financing this very modern building project by forming companies in which both private investors and the government would participate. Among Epstein's other suggestions were increasing the potable water supply of the city, regular street cleaning, and a strictly enforced food and drug law. Undoubtedly his most controversial suggestion must have been the closing of the camposantos and the introduction of cremation of bodies.⁸⁵ Only a true positivist would place health and sanitation above the traditions and long held religious beliefs of the people.

⁸⁵ Isidoro Epstein, "La mortalidad en México," Boletín de La Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía Y Estadística Cuarta Epoca, Tomo II (1893), 744-755.

In the Society's Boletín in 1894, Epstein refuted an article on the census of Aguascalientes written by his colleague, the eminent Dr. Jesús Díaz de León. Dr. Díaz de León, statistician, was at the same time the most eminent Hebrew scholar of Mexico who translated several books of the Old Testament into Spanish with commentaries on the culture of the Jews in Biblical times. Epstein, with his careful German scholarship that fit the positivist philosophy so well, demonstrated through a comparison with population and housing figures of major European cities that the population of Aguascalientes quoted by Díaz de León was far too high. Epstein's most telling piece of evidence, however, was a comparison with the statistics he himself had published in 1856.⁸⁶ Consequently, Dr. Díaz de León answered Epstein, thanking him for pointing out the error and laying the blame on his informant in Aguascalientes who had given him an incorrect figure which led to an estimate double the actual population of the city.⁸⁷

The entire body of Epstein's work, from his 1874 articles urging European immigration and railroad construction, to his "scientific" arguments against anti-semitism and his careful statistical analyses of mortality and population in 1893 and 1894, spanned the era of intellectual positivism in

⁸⁶ Isidoro Epstein, "El censo de Aguascalientes," Boletín, Cuarta Epoca, Tomo III (1894), pp. 88-91.

⁸⁷ Jesús Díaz de León, "Carta relativa al artículo anterior," Boletín, III (1894), 92-94.

Mexico and perfectly illustrates the dominant philosophy of that period.

It is easy to understand why Epstein was honored among the German colony as well as by his colleagues in the Society of Geography and Statistics and in the Press Association which he helped to found and in which he served as Treasurer. In a biographical sketch of Isidoro Epstein, the Mexican poet, Ricardo Domínguez, concluded that the community which Epstein had chosen as his home had accepted him as a member of the family, as "truly, one of our brothers."⁸⁸

If Isidoro Epstein personified the positivist in Mexico, his Mexican coreligionist, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, personified the approaching new liberalism. Rivas enjoyed a career of more than forty years as a professor of Greek at the very institution that had been established for the purpose of teaching positivism to the young generation of educated Mexicans.⁸⁹ The National Preparatory School, however, had deviated from orthodox positivism from its inception by including in its curriculum, in addition to empirical subjects, the courses in classical languages which Rivas taught. The Preparatory School, at the insistence of its anti-positivist professors, was also the first institution to acknowledge

⁸⁸ Ricardo Domínguez, Galería de escritores y periodistas de la Prensa Asociada (México: El Partido Liberal, 1890), pp. 36-39.

⁸⁹ Rafael Heliodoro Valle, "Judíos en México," Revista Chilena de historia y geografía, Tomo 81 (Santiago de Chile, 1936), p. 232.

the break with positivism with a change in the choice of textbooks as early as 1881.⁹⁰

Francisco Rivas Puigcerver was born in Campeche, Yucatán in 1850 (the year before Isidoro Epstein arrived in Mexico), the son of crypto-Jews well known in their community simply as Spaniards.⁹¹ Young Rivas attended the Colegio Seminario de San Miguel de Estrada in Campeche where his outstanding performance as a student of Latin and Greek won him recognition and a government scholarship to study at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City where he earned the degree of Doctor of Philology.⁹² Although Rivas never wrote of his New York experience, it seems likely that living for several years in the United States strengthened his devotion to religious freedom as one of the most significant of constitutional principles.

Rivas served the liberal cause in Mexico by fighting to quell a conservative rebellion in Campeche, and later as a "hot-headed young rebel" in support of Lerdo de Tejada against President Juárez in 1871.⁹³ According to his obituary,

⁹⁰ O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra" in Seis estudios, p. 183. also, Porfirio Parrá, "La lógica Bain y los profesores sus enemigos," La Libertad (México), July 16, 1880.

⁹¹ Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, El Sábado (Mexico), April 27, 1889.

⁹² "Era el decaño del magisterio nacional," El Universal (México), October 17, 1924. In a letter to the author, dated June 8, 1970, the secretary to President John C. Bennett of the Union Theological Seminary wrote that there are no records of Rivas attending that institution.

⁹³ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "Francisco Rivas," Publication of The American Jewish Historical Society, XXXV (1939), 223.

Rivas won praise for his bravery and two bullet wounds in his legs.⁹⁴ To Francisco Rivas, the Constitution of 1857 meant far more than the expression of the political victory of the liberals and the proclamation of liberal laws. To Rivas, the Constitution was a literal description of reality in Mexico, and the language master's limited career as a publisher of Jewish periodicals in Mexico is a clear demonstration of one man's faith in the liberalism of the Mexican Republic.

In February 1889, in a country in which there was no organized Jewish congregation and had never been a synagogue, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver published a periodical entitled El Sábado Secreto which carried the notice, "This periodical will be circulated only among Israelites."⁹⁵ The very existence of El Sábado Secreto was a denial of the dominant philosophy of positivism. Rivas' basic tenet - that differences in religious belief were perfectly legitimate - denied the positivist theory that in every phase of human life one demonstrable truth existed, and all else was false. The philosophy of Francisco Rivas did conform to the standards of the time in so far as he professed that the teachings of Judaism were universal.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ El Universal, October 17, 1934. There is some disagreement between Rivas' account of his birth date (1850), the war in which he fought, and the obituary in El Universal. The newspaper cites the professor's birth date as 1842 and his military service in the Three Years War, 1858-1861.

⁹⁵ El Sábado Secreto, February 9, 1889.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The lead article, headed "Our Program," revealed Rivas as a precursor of the new liberal nationalists of the twentieth century. One of the prerequisites for developing a united Mexican nation would be a recognition of the Mexicans as a distinctive people with a distinctive history. With this self recognition, national policy after 1910 would be based on Mexican realities rather than on such unworkable European models as Reforma liberalism and Porfirian positivism. The following chapter will demonstrate how the concept articulated by Justo Sierra in 1908 and Andrés Molina Enríquez in 1909, describing the Mexican people as a new race produced by the fusion of the Spaniard and the Indian, received national recognition and became the basis of the laws and institutions of the Mexican social revolution.

Francisco Rivas in 1889 expounded a similar theory, but with a variation that would not have the same appeal to the majority of Mexicans. Rivas was the descendant of generations of Spanish crypto-Jews, and although baptized as Roman Catholics, they preserved certain ancient customs and always an awareness of being Jewish. Consequently, Rivas' concept of the "new race" included the recognition of the Jew and the Moor, who were among the early Spanish colonists in Mexico, as contributors to the Mexican race. His concept of Mexico was presented in the "Program" which he announced in El Sábado Secreto.

OUR PROGRAM

When in 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella expelled from the Iberian peninsula those Spaniards who believed in the unity of God, simultaneously they sent Columbus to discover the New World in which the expelled would find a fatherland and the Spanish a New Spain.

And when the priest conqueror baptised by force the Arab and Hebrew peninsulares as well as the natives of the new found continent, he turned the Moor into the morisco, the Jew into the judaizante, the autochthonous into the Indian, and all into New Christians. Why did not the clergy understand that from the fusion of eastern and western peoples would certainly be born a New World race that later would free the conquered land and would reclaim in religion and in politics their independence and their lost liberties?

This fusion then is the origin of the Spanish-Americans, our origin, since the celibate priests could never have been our ancestors. On this basis we firmly defend the victims that religious-political fanaticism still sacrifices today; we enter the journalistic arena to fight the cause of our fathers and grandfathers which is the cause of humanity. We shall publish the autos-da-fe held in eighteenth century Spain [a rare collection had been purchased by Rivas' grandfather] so that we may recognize ourselves by name; we shall condemn the cruelties of the Inquisition and proclaim the Jewish fraternity which is liberal, which is masonic, which is universal.⁹⁷

In this issue, Rivas also exhorted the Jews of Mexico to declare themselves and to live openly as Jews. Although he changed the title of his publication in later issues and tried to extend his readership to the entire liberal intellectual community by publishing erudite articles on the etymology of Spanish words, Rivas continued to publish the autos-da-fe and articles on medieval Jewish history in Spain and on the cruelties of the Inquisition. The second journal

⁹⁷ El Sábado Secreto, February 9, 1889.

title used by Rivas was La Luz de Sabádo, and an article entitled "Felix o Feliz" was well received and reprinted in both El Partido Liberal and in Germania.⁹⁸ Epstein's periodical also published the single article that Rivas wrote for the Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística.⁹⁹

From April to August 1889, in the journal entitled El Sábado, Francisco Rivas consistently declared his faith in the liberalism of Mexico, where Jewish people could live and worship openly because:

Mexico has no state religion, and offers protection to all creeds and all nationalities with freedom of religion and liberal laws which the citizens of the Republic have achieved at great sacrifice. Our country serves as a model to other countries which are struggling to achieve this high grade of civilization. We Mexicans ask nobody, which is the God that you adore? Nor do we ask what religious, political, or philosophic ideas do you profess? Free and independent is the man who lives under the constitutional system.¹⁰⁰

The descriptions of liberal Mexico were intended not only for his Mexican readers, but for prospective immigrants from the Turkish Empire. Rivas corresponded with the editors of Jewish periodicals in Constantinople and arranged to have his publications distributed in the Empire in an effort to encourage immigration to Mexico, and to stimulate commerce between the countries.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ El Partido Liberal, February 27, 1889, and Germania, March 1, 1889.

⁹⁹ Germania, September 26, 1891.

¹⁰⁰ El Sábado, April 27, 1889.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., June 1, 1889.

In his attempt to make his periodical more universal, Francisco Rivas made a significant change in El Sábado. No longer was it a "Jewish" periodical as El Sábado Secreto had been, but "the organ of the Yoellim." Rivas identified himself as a descendant of Yoellim.¹⁰² The term means monotheist and therefore has less of a sectarian and more of a universal connotation than "Jewish" or "Israelita." It is possible that Rivas, a master of ten or eleven languages, invented the word "Yoellim," which he defined as an isolated sect of Sephardim (Iberian Jews) who treated "all men as brothers." However, his profession of universalism did not dim the publisher's enthusiasm for Judaism, nor his interest in establishing Jewish worship in Mexico. In fact, Francisco Rivas even organized a Jewish congregation which met at his home.

The "service" described by Francisco Rivas illustrates the results of the centuries of secret Judaism. Long years of secret observance and the absence of religious education left the marranos with almost no real knowledge of their religion. Francisco Rivas was unusual in his extensive knowledge of the Hebrew language. In most cases one or two Hebrew books, carefully hidden, served as a reminder of the ancient religion, but seldom was there anyone able to understand the mysterious language. Even Francisco Rivas, who owned a magnificent library of rare Hebrew books and manuscripts, was relatively ignorant of traditional Jewish practice.

¹⁰² Ibid., April 27, 1889.

In El Sábado Rivas reported that on a Saturday in April 1889, he invited a group of five Sehardim and five Yoellim to his home to form a minyan which would meet regularly. (A minyan refers to the ten men required by Jewish law as the minimum for holding a religious service.) Rivas' description of the simple service demonstrates the naive expression of faith and the pure joy of the no-longer-secret Jews. The service consisted of the reading of "the very beautiful Psalm 133" by one of the members of the newly organized congregation, "to the hearty applause of the rest of the minyan."¹⁰³

More significant than the act or the form of worship is the fact that Francisco Rivas wrote the report and published it in Mexico. Although isolated reports of Jewish activity in Mexico had been reported earlier in the press of the United States, England, and Germany, this account of April 27, 1889 is the first record of Jewish worship ever published in a Mexican periodical. It would remain unique in this respect until 1904.

In his old age, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver would be known as a "character," an eccentric who refused to have electric lights in his home and who spent his afternoons entertaining young women with fantastic and sometimes off-color stories.¹⁰⁴ In his middle years he was a

¹⁰³ Ibid., April 27, 1889.

¹⁰⁴ Anita Brenner, "Afternoons of a Patriarch," Menorah Journal, XIV (New York), January 1928, 100-103.

distinguished looking gentleman with a flowing white beard, and a charming host who, with his equally charming wife (a Cuban and also a daughter of secret Jews), entertained "high and low, rich and poor with the same affability, like true children of the patriarch Abraham."¹⁰⁵ At the Rivas home in Tacubaya the "gastronomic treats" prepared by Señora Rivas were rivaled only by the beauty of the flowering garden. It seemed to at least one observer in 1905 that Rivas knew everybody in Mexico, and "his circle of intimate friends embraced all the high officials, including the President."¹⁰⁶

The triumph of Francisco Rivas' career came in 1910 when he was honored for his achievements at the National Preparatory School with the title of "Master of Living and Dead Languages," but a greater tribute came from the generations of his students who affectionately called him "Papa Rivas." Having no children of his own, Rivas made of each student an adopted son and was loved in return for his generous friendship, advice, hospitality, and even money.¹⁰⁷

In his last years Rivas was heard to say, "All Mexico has been taught by a Jew and they do not know it."¹⁰⁸ This, however, was the remark of an old man. Francisco Rivas had

¹⁰⁵ Harris, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ El Universal, October 17, 1924; Excelsior, October 17, 1924.

¹⁰⁸ Brenner, "Afternoons of a Patriarch," p. 101; and Zielonka, "Francisco Rivas," p. 225.

lived openly as a Jew, published his periodicals as a Jew, and traveled as a Jew actively seeking immigration for Mexico.¹⁰⁹ He also participated joyfully and publicly in the beginnings of Jewish organization in the twentieth century.¹¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, the heir of the Inquisition and centuries of danger and secrecy, lived more openly as a Jew in Mexico than the nineteenth century French, English, and German businessmen who did not acknowledge themselves openly as Jews for fear that their customers would disappear. Most of the Europeans preferred to be known only as nationals of their home countries, disliked, perhaps, as foreigners, but safe from the risk of being regarded as horned devils disguised as men.¹¹¹

Francisco Rivas, like his colleagues at the National Preparatory School, Justo Sierra and Jesús Díaz de León (and unlike the positivist, Isidoro Epstein), represented the new liberalism that would replace positivism as the dominant Mexican ideology. The European Jews, on the other hand, and especially the Frenchmen who were their leaders, knew that upper class Mexicans, educated formally or informally in the positivist school, continued to view religion condescendingly as an atavism of the unenlightened. And the superstition

¹⁰⁹ The Menorah, XIII (November 1892), 100.

¹¹⁰ Harris, pp. 17, 23-24.

¹¹¹ Cf. Carlton Beals, "Prospect in Mexico," Menorah Journal, XX (April 1932), 51-60.

and fear of the "Jew" among the common people was taken for granted by all but idealists like Francisco Rivas.¹¹²

The last decade of the Porfiriato would bring changes in the Jewish population of Mexico, further progress toward a new liberalism in Mexican politics and society, and open religious activity for the first time in the history of the Jewish people in Mexico.

¹¹² Jewish Chronicle, June 6, 1862; Anita Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), 330-331; Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York and London: Century Company, 1928), pp. 244 and 252.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST DECADE UNDER PORFIRIO DÍAZ: 1900 TO 1910

With the opening of the twentieth century Mexico, at least to all outward appearances, was in the best possible position. While censorship, arrests, and deportations silenced the criticism of the liberal intellectuals, and the guns of ex-bandit government rurales silenced the demonstrations of the masses, the heads of state of the western world regarded Porfirio Díaz as a great and noble leader, a dedicated patriot who had led his country from chaos and debt to order and prosperity. Ambitious and well publicized projects in public health and education as well as impressive exhibits at the Paris Exposition of 1899 attested to the progress, prosperity, and stability of Mexico. Mexican credit had never stood so high, and Speyer Brothers, the Jewish banking firm of New York, London, and Frankfort, was the fortunate holder of the Mexican bond issue of 1904.¹

The financial arrangement which was reached by the Speyers and José Yves Limantour, the financial genius and Secretaría de Hacienda (Secretary of the Treasury) of the Díaz government, was the proudest achievement of Limantour's career. The agreement made it possible for the Mexican government to purchase a majority of shares in the national

¹ Jan Bazant, Historia de la deuda exterior de México (1823-1946) (México: El Colegio de México, 1968), p. 161.

railroad system from the English and American holders. For the first time, Mexicans, rather than foreigners, held control of a major Mexican enterprise.² In contrast to the difficulties the Mexican government had experienced throughout the nineteenth century in securing credit at any price, international financiers were competing for the business of the Mexican government by the early 1900's. The Speyer company was the highest bidder for the privilege of granting the 1904 loan to Mexico, and the terms of the bond issue were evidence of the excellent credit of the Mexican government.

Yet underneath the facade of prosperity and stability were the rumblings of the masses - the disinherited land-starved Indians and the workers suppressed by relentless government strikebreakers. Added to this was the frustration of the aspiring young politicians who were denied all opportunity by the iron rule and good health of the dictator, Porfirio Díaz. The dissatisfactions that would erupt into violent social revolution in 1910 were presaged in the calls for liberty even by such loyal supporters of Díaz as Justo Sierra. "Liberty" did not mean social revolution or land for the peasants, but "liberty" did mean freedom of thought and freedom of expression and the opening of a newly liberal society. Where the liberalism of the Reforma had been individualistic to the extreme, where positivism with its pseudoscientific single standard of empirically determined truth had curbed

² Ibid., p. 159.

both liberty and individualism, the new liberalism was social in nature as it began to recognize that different groups with different cultures and different needs lived within the Mexican nation.

This social liberalism was most important for the nation in its implications for the future of the peasant and labor groups, but it also affected minority groups in Mexico. It would be several years before the people of the interior towns and the rural areas would feel the change which in the first decade of the twentieth century was confined almost exclusively to Mexico City and Guadalajara. One minority group that benefited from the developing social liberalism was the Jewish population of Mexico City. A more open atmosphere and a new appreciation of differences in culture and tradition made it possible for the Jews of the capital city to begin to organize their congregation and even to talk publicly about building a synagogue. Some Jews - very important ones - remained hesitant about identifying themselves as Jews. For the most part, these were the Jews from Alsace. They had been in Mexico the longest, they held the most wealth, and they enjoyed close and advantageous relationships with the upper echelons of Mexican government and society. During the first decade of the twentieth century, however, a large number of Jews came to live in Mexico, and this immigration changed not only the number but the character of the Jewish population of the country.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact number of Jews in Mexico at the end of the Porfiriato, a

somewhat reliable estimate can be reached by a comparison with the total foreign population of the nation. Based on government census results which recorded the foreign population of the country only from the year 1885, the number of foreigners in Mexico more than doubled from 48,521 in 1885 to 116,527 in 1910.³ In spite of this increase, foreigners still comprised less than one percent of the total population of Mexico in 1910. Figure 2 illustrates the relative percentage of foreigners to native Mexicans in the total population.

Figure 2.

Relative distribution of the Mexican and foreign populations of Mexico, 1884-1910.⁴

Year	Mexican population	Foreign population
1885	99.60%	0.39%
1900	99.53%	0.42%
1910	99.23%	0.77%

Mexico received but a tiny share of the greatest mass migration in human history, as more than twenty-two million

³ Mexico. Secretaría de Economía, Estadísticas sociales del Porfiriato: 1877-1910 (México: Dirección General de Estadística, 1956), p. 34. The numbers given under the heading "Extranjeros residentes en las entidades federativas: Años de 1885 a 1910" indicate a cumulative total as compiled by the census demographers. No attempt was made to record the entrance of immigrants to Mexico until March 1, 1909 with the implementation of the Ley de inmigración de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (México: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1909).

⁴ "Población mexicana por entidades federativas, Años de 1895 a 1910," Estadísticas sociales, p. 192.

persons left Europe to make their homes on the American continents in the years between 1885 and 1910.⁵ The Mexican government, which lamented its small share of the immigrants, published a comparative listing of the numbers of foreigners living in several American nations. In spite of its continuous efforts to attract European immigrants, Mexico stood at the bottom of the list. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3.

Foreign population of various
American countries, 1910.⁶

Country	Foreign population, 1910
United States	13,515,886
Argentina	2,357,952
Canada	1,586,961
Brazil	1,279,063
Cuba	228,477
Uruguay	181,222
Chile	134,525
Mexico	116,527

A certain number of the 116,527 foreigners in Mexico in 1910 were Jews, but the exact number can only be approximated. The difficulty of determining the Jewish population of Mexico is demonstrated by the wide range of estimates listed in Figure 4.

⁵ Total based on "Text Table 1. Intercontinental Immigration of Aliens into American countries in Annual Average by Quincennia, 1821-1924," International Migrations: Statistics, ed. Walter F. Willcox (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., 1929), I, 168.

⁶ "Extranjeros que habitan en el Continente Americano, Año de 1910," Estadísticas Sociales, p. 34.

Figure 4.

Estimates of Jewish population of Mexico, 1905 to 1910.

Source	Estimate
Dr. Sidney Uhlfelder	75 families plus a few single men ⁷
J. L. Weinberger	100 Jewish families ⁸
Census of Mexico, 1910	254 ⁹
Victor Harris, 1905	500 ¹⁰
Contemporanea Enciclopedia	1,000 ¹¹
American Jewish Year Book	8,972 ¹²
Universal Jewish Encyclopedia	10,000 ¹³
Seymour B. Liebman	10,000 to 15,000 ¹⁴
Solomon Kahan	15,000 ¹⁵

⁷ Cited by Maurice B. Hexter in "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (New York, March 1926), 188.

⁸ "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau: Correspondence of Rabbi Martin Zielonka, Joseph L. Weinberger, Archibald A. Marx, Isaac M. Rubinow, and other individuals relating to the activities of the Bureau, Mexico, D. F., Cincinnati, Ohio, New Orleans, La., and El Paso, Texas, 1929-1947," AJA, Microfilm No. 841.

⁹ Mexican census of 1910 cited by Tovye Meisel, "The Jews of Mexico," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, III (New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute, 1948), 296.

¹⁰ The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), preface.

¹¹ Contemporanea Enciclopedia (1940), pp. 897-898.

¹² "Jewish Statistics," American Jewish Year Book 5669 (Baltimore: American Jewish Historical Society, 1906), p. 129. The American Jewish Year Book will be abbreviated hereafter as AJYB.

¹³ Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (New York, 1942), VII, 510.

¹⁴ "They Came with Cortés," Judaism (New York Winter 1969), p. 98.

¹⁵ "The Jewish Community in Mexico," Contemporary Jewish Record, III (New York, May-June 1940), 253.

There are several reasons for the wide discrepancy between the official 1910 census figure of 254 and the higher estimates. The religious item was included in the census questionnaire for the first time in 1885. However, in only a few states was it worded in a way that would elicit a precise response. The majority of states merely asked the respondee to declare himself as "Catholic," "Other Cult," or "Without Religion." A few states did add the category, "Protestant"; others included "Buddhist." Only eleven states, however, included Israelita as a declared religion.¹⁶ The term Israelita itself was ambiguous as it did not necessarily mean "Jewish." Members of the Iglesia de Dios, a Christian sect, sometimes identified themselves as Israelitas, and, as a result, Jew and non-Jew were frequently classed in the same religious category.¹⁷

The wide differences even among the larger estimates may be explained by the different basis on which the estimates were made. Victor Harris, an American journalist who spent several months in Mexico in 1905, estimated "500 Jews in Mexico City" at about the same time that the American Jewish Year Book estimated 8,972. Harris' estimate referred to the number of people who were pointed out to him as Jews or who attended the Jewish religious services. The statistician for the

¹⁶ Mexico. Dirección General de Estadística, Censo de la República Mexicana: División territorial de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1910 (México: Secretaría de Fomento, Colonización, e Industria, 1912).

¹⁷ Seymour B. Liebman, "The Mestizo Jews of Mexico," American Jewish Archives, XIX (November 1967), 144-174.

Year Book, on the other hand, based his figures on emigration figures from Europe, steamship passages, and published sources that would indicate the origins of many immigrants to Mexico.¹⁸ The factor that made an accurate estimate most difficult was that the majority of Jews in Mexico were not known as Jews and did not identify themselves as such, but rather as nationals of their country of origin. They were simply Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, or Americans.¹⁹ Thus, there was no reliable method to count Jews in Mexico.

Admittedly, to make an accurate estimate of the Jewish population before 1910 seems an insoluble problem. However, the certificates of naturalization issued to new citizens by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs do provide another basis for arriving at an estimate of the Jewish population. That seventy-eight Jews became Mexican citizens between 1877 and 1899 has been demonstrated (See Chapter 2, p. 64). Another sixty-two probable Jewish names appear in the Cartas de Naturalización between 1900 and 1910. This brings the total number of naturalized Mexican citizens of Jewish origin to one hundred and forty (140) for the thirty-four year period of the Díaz presidency.²⁰ In spite of the obvious limitation in accuracy imposed by reliance on Jewish sounding names as a basis for statistics, the figure of 140 is accepted because

¹⁸ "General Jewish Statistics," AJYB 5669 (1906), p. 127.

¹⁹ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB, XXXIII (1923), 430.

²⁰ Cartas de Naturalización,

although non-Jews may inadvertently have been included, an equal or greater number of Jews are just as likely to have been excluded.

A total of 2,456 men became naturalized citizens of Mexico between 1877 and 1910.²¹ Of this total, the 140 Jewish men comprise 5.7 percent. Although only a small proportion of foreigners in Mexico became citizens, the figure of 5.7 percent is quite likely to be a close approximation of the relative distribution of Jews to the total foreign population of the country. By applying the 5.7 percent to the 116,527 foreigners in Mexico, the number of Jewish men living in Mexico in 1910 can be estimated at 6,642. Adding to this number the Jewish women and children as well as native born Mexican Jews, the Jewish population of Mexico in 1910 probably was very close to the figure published by the American Jewish Year Book which estimated 8,972 Jews in Mexico in 1906.²²

During the last decade of the Porfiriato, more Cartas de Naturalización were issued than in any previous decade, and as would be expected, the number of new citizens with Jewish names was proportionately larger. A change in the character of the Jewish immigration is reflected in this longer list. For the first time, Jews from Germany no longer head the list, and this position is occupied by an entirely

²¹ Ibid.

²² AJYB 5669 (1906), p. 129.

new group. Of the sixty-two probable Jewish names listed, the nationality of twenty of them is recorded as Turco.²³

The following table (Figure 5) illustrates the numbers of Jewish men naturalized as Mexican citizens from 1877 to 1910 according to the countries from which they emigrated.

Figure 5.

Naturalized Mexican citizens with
Jewish names by country of origin.²⁴

Country of origin	1877-1889	1890-1899	1900-1910	Total
Germany	26	16	16	58
United States	2	8	4	14
France	7	2	6	15
Austria-Hungary	5	1	4	10
Denmark	2	0	0	2
Russia	2	1	4	7
Switzerland	1	0	0	1
Turkey	1	1	20	22
England	1	2	3	6
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Cuba	0	0	4	4
Total	47	31	62	140

In about 1890, Jews as well as Christians began to arrive in Mexico from the Turkish Empire. They came in ever increasing numbers throughout the Porfiriato. In fact, the census of 1895 lists 367 Turcos, and the census of 1910 registers 2,907.²⁵

²³ Cartas de Naturalización.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Moisés González Navarro, La colonización en México 1877-1910 (México: El Colegio de México, 1960), p. 91.

Many of the Jews who emigrated from the moribund Turkish Empire spoke Ladino, a Spanish dialect based on old Castilian Spanish. These were the true Sephardic Jews whose ancestors had been driven from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century. The majority, however, were Arabic speaking Jews from Syria, whose families had spent the 2,000 years of the diaspora in the countries bordering their ancient homeland. These Jews did not come as investors or merchants or entrepreneurs; they came to Mexico with nothing and made their living as peddlers. They made their headquarters in Mexico City and Veracruz and in the interior cities of Torreón and Mérida. From these places, they went out, packs on their backs, to peddle their soaps and notions and images of saints to poor Mexicans on the haciendas and in the villages throughout the country.²⁶ While both the Mexican liberals and conservatives had consistently disagreed on the desirability of non-Catholic immigration from Europe, they were in complete agreement in regard to the Turcos. El País called them "dirty" and "beggars," and El Imparcial, with the greater dignity befitting the semi-official government newspaper, claimed that the Turkish immigration was "in general, not propitious for the country."²⁷

²⁶ Martin Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB, XXXIII (1923), 430. Cf. Anita Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," The Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), 334.

²⁷ El País (México), September 3, 1889 and El Imparcial (México), December 9, 1905. The Turcos were equally disliked in South America, where, according to one French writer, "their numbers unfortunately increase from year to year." They were

The general decay of the "sick man of Europe" motivated thousands of emigrants. A large number went to the United States, but the majority chose the countries of Latin America because of the similar language. Their reasons for choosing Mexico cannot be exactly determined. It would seem obvious, however, from the attitude expressed in the Mexican newspapers that the President's immigration agents were not offering these Jews free passage and cheap land as inducements to immigrate. At least one Mexican did encourage Jews from the Empire to come to Mexico. Francisco Rivas, the patriotic Mexican Jew truly believed that Mexico was a land of opportunity. During the few months in 1889 in which he published his periodicals, he voiced his support of the government policy of encouraging immigration to Mexico. Necesitamos brazos was the demand of the nation, and Rivas believed that he could contribute to the prosperity and development of Mexico as well as to the well-being of less fortunate Sephardic Jews in the Orient. As a result, Rivas wrote to journalists in the Balkan countries who, at that time, were publishing Jewish periodicals in the Ladino language. Rivas arranged for these men to distribute his paper in the Empire. Each issue of El Sábado included praise of Mexico, its liberal government, and assurances of the many opportunities available for the industrious immigrant.²⁸ It is certainly possible that some

generally considered even less desirable than the Russians, (René Gonnard, Essai sur l'histoire de l'emigration [Paris: Libraire Valois, 1928], p. 280).

²⁸ Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, El Sábado (Mexico), April 27, 1889 to August 6, 1889.

oriental Jews chose Mexico because of the influence of the idealistic and dedicated Francisco Rivas. Another factor may have been the technical schools that had been established since 1870 by the Paris based Alliance Israelite Universelle and those which were later supported by the European philanthropist, Baron Maurice de Hirsch.²⁹

Alliance Israelite Universelle was organized as a direct result of anti-semitic outbreaks in Syria. Large Jewish communities had long been established in Damascus and Aleppo, and the Jews in these cities had been the victims of hostility from their Arab neighbors for years. In the year 1840, events occurred which were momentous for world Jewry. A Capuchin father had disappeared shortly after a bitter quarrel with a Moslem mule driver. For whatever reason, the rumor was spread that the monk was the victim of a ritual murder by Jews who planned to use his blood to bake their Passover matzah. Rather than let the matter drop, the French consul in Damascus insisted that the Syrian governor investigate the charges. As a result, several Jews were arrested and tortured and even more horrifying, sixty Jewish children were imprisoned in cells in order to force confessions from their parents. Mob violence raged, synagogues were burned, and some Jews were fatally beaten. The "Damascus Affair" became a cause célèbre and aroused the Jews of the western world to the sufferings

²⁹ Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), pp. 636 and 659.

of the Jews in the orient.³⁰ The affair brought forth plans for colonizing Palestine as a haven for the persecuted Jews. At that time, Palestine was a sparsely populated province of Syria, while Syria and Egypt together formed one of the major territorial divisions of the Turkish Empire. While the "Damascus Affair" was the catalyst that sparked early Zionist efforts, more immediately it led to the formation of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, which acted to protect Jewish rights and established schools for Jews across North Africa and as far east as Baghdad.³¹ These schools served the dual purpose of spreading western culture and training young Jewish men in manual trades in preparation for emigration. By 1909, the Alliance supported 150 schools with 45,000 pupils.³² As an American visitor found in 1908, at least a few of the graduates of these schools did emigrate to Mexico.³³

The young men who came to Mexico from Syria were not concerned about connections with Mexican officials and Mexican society. They were accustomed to being undesirables in their homeland, and they accepted that same designation in Mexico. These young men were in Mexico to avoid persecution and to

³⁰ Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), pp. 12-13.

³¹ Grayzel, p. 636.

³² "Work of the Alliance Israelite Universelle," Independent (New York), October 14, 1909, pp. 852-857.

³³ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite, July 23, 1908.

make money, and for some reason they believed that opportunity existed for hard working men. They were also deeply religious and in 1900 (or perhaps 1901) they organized their first synagogue in the house of an Arabian Jewish family named "Smoke" on Calle de Capuchinas opposite the Velador.³⁴ These Jews were people with neither political nor social connections in Mexico. As a result, hardly a soul outside their own group even knew that there was a synagogue in Mexico. By 1908 the oriental Jews had established at least two Jewish houses of worship, and by 1918 there were four permanent synagogues using the Sephardic service. Their synagogues were remodeled from former residences and by 1918 each was big enough to accommodate more than a hundred people.³⁵

When Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso, Texas visited Mexico in 1908, he was amazed to find a congregation of these young men which was very well organized and holding daily morning and evening services. Mr. Julio Meyer, a German Jew who had lived in Mexico since before 1890, and Mr. Assael, a Sephardic Jew from European Turkey, took the rabbi to morning services in an adobe house "way beyond downtown at Maravillas #11." Rabbi Zielonka remarked on the orthodox service and the beautiful Sephardic pronunciation of the Hebrew prayers. What really impressed him, however, was that a group of young men with no prominent leader had organized a synagogue simply

³⁴ Francisco Pedro González, "Jews in Mexico," American Israelite, March 31, 1921.

³⁵ Ibid.

because they wanted one. The members of this little congregation were rather a surprise to the rabbi. "Twenty-two young men were present, most of them under thirty years old, and quite intelligent," Rabbi Zielonka wrote from Mexico City. In fact he had "seldom met a more manly looking lot of young men." In conversation the Rabbi learned that most of them were graduates of the Baron de Hirsch and the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools. Rabbi Zielonka could hardly wait to tell the leading Jews of Mexico City that there actually was a synagogue in Mexico. These leaders, mostly Frenchmen from Alsace, revealed the almost total lack of communication between the European and the oriental Jews. They were completely unaware of the existence of the Syrian congregation and responded to the news with genuine surprise and curiosity.³⁶

When Francisco Pedro González wrote about the Jews of Mexico in 1921, there were more than five hundred Arab Jews in Mexico City. He found that most of them were intense Jewish nationalists who "spend their time in their cafes smoking cigarettes and narghiles and talking Zionism." Indeed, the moment the Armistice was declared, many of them "packed their trunks in preparation to go to Palestine."³⁷

Both the González article and Rabbi Zielonka's letter suggest that at least some of the oriental Jews were something more than poor displaced persons looking only for a place to

³⁶ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 23, 1908.

³⁷ González, "Jews in Mexico."

make a living. These educated young Zionists, perhaps the elite of the Turcos, certainly do not fit the stereotype of the uncultured oriental Jew, caring only for selling the goods in his pack and making enough money to stay alive.

While the oriental Jews lived and worshiped separately from the other Jews in the city, the Sephardim joined the Europeans as part of a single community. The immigration of Sephardic Jews from Europe began about 1900 and continued throughout the 1920's. Several Sephardic families who had lived in Greece and Turkey migrated to Mexico between 1900 and 1910. About twelve of these families would be active participants in the Jewish community from the first planned communitywide service through the development of the modern community.³⁸ With their Ashkenazic colleagues they were established permanent residents of Mexico before 1910, and were ready to help the thousands of immigrants from eastern Europe and the defunct Turkish Empire who would arrive in Mexico a few years later, penniless and unskilled.

Among the earliest of the Sephardim to settle in Mexico City were the Assael brothers who participated from the first in congregational activities. Señor A. Assael would be a charter member and officer of the first Jewish organizations in Mexico, the Sociedad Emanuel in 1905 and Monte Sinai in 1908.³⁹ J. Assael had operated the Hotel Opera in 1899 but

³⁸ Interview with Rubén Mazal (Mexico), December 5, 1969.

³⁹ Harris, p. 23. Also, Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 30, 1908.

by 1910 he and his brother were the proprietors of La Turquesa, which they advertised as "the only house in Mexico specializing in precious antique jewelry and oriental rugs."⁴⁰

Another of the Sephardim to reach Mexico before the turn of the century was Rafael Eskenazi who emigrated from Greece. Sr. Eskenazi is not typical of the Jewish immigrants mentioned in this chapter. He was not a merchant, nor did he settle in Mexico City. However, his experience suggests why the majority of the Jewish immigrants did, after a short time in the interior, gravitate to the cities.

Señor Eskenazi had been in the cheese business in Greece, and in order to continue in the only field he knew, he settled in a small town where he could raise goats. Since he spoke Spanish, as did all of the Sephardic immigrants, the townspeople assumed that he was a Spaniard. One day the priest approached Sr. Eskenazi and asked him why he did not attend Mass and Confession. When Sr. Eskenazi answered that he was a Jew, the priest warned him that he had better leave town within a few hours or be lynched.⁴¹ Evidently Rafael Eskenazi took the priest's advice, for he was soon safely established in Mexico City as the proprietor of La Casa del

⁴⁰ Figueroa Domenech, Guía general descriptiva de la República mexicana, Tomo Primero: El Distrito Federal (México: Ramón de S. N. Araluse, 1899), unnumbered directory pages. See also José Romero, Guía Ciudad de México (México: Porrúa Hermanos, 1910), advertising pages.

⁴¹ Letter from Morris Riskind to Sam Michaels, October 31, 1969.

Traje Hecho: The American Clothing Company.⁴² His abortive experience as a dairy farmer would prove to be of benefit to the immigrants of the 1920's when Sr. Eskenazi served as Employment Chairman of the committee to aid immigrants. He was instrumental in setting up several dairy farms run by Russian Jews. All, however, were located in the Federal District.⁴³

The Sephardic Jews were among the most interested in establishing a synagogue in Mexico City. They were too few in number, however, to organize their own congregation, and not wealthy or powerful enough to influence the European population of the city.⁴⁴ So it was that at the beginning of the twentieth century when the oriental Jews were worshiping daily in their first small synagogue, the European Jews of Mexico City, stronger by far in numbers and wealth, did not yet have one formal Jewish organization. The reason seemed to be the unwillingness of the French to associate themselves with any Jewish group. The English and Germans believed that the Alsatians, who were the largest group in number as well as the wealthiest, should take the initiative and provide the most money. The Alsatians, however, were completely opposed to the idea, and since they were the most prominent, the

⁴² Letter from Rafael Eskenazi to Rabbi Martin Zielonka, December 23, 1921, "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau: Correspondence and Reports of Rabbi Martin Zielonka relating to activities of the Bureau," AJA, microfilm No. 600. Referred to hereafter as "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence."

⁴³ Maurice B. Hexter, "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (1926), 193.

⁴⁴ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 16, 1908.

most wealthy, and had lived in Mexico the longest, "the newcomers accepted the conclusions of these leaders."⁴⁵

However, the Jewish population of the city was growing rapidly, and small groups of Jews did meet in private homes to observe the annual Holy Days. By 1904 the European Jewish population of the city numbered about five hundred families and included a number who began to talk in earnest about building a synagogue. That year a small core of concerned Jews who called themselves "The Committee" arranged to celebrate the annual High Holy Days with a single service for all the Jews in Mexico City. The Masonic Lodge provided a large hall free of charge, a Torah and other religious accessories were ordered from New York, and the Jews of Mexico City welcomed the Jewish New Year 5665 as one community.⁴⁶

The unofficial elder statesman of "The Committee" was a Hungarian Jew who had lived in Mexico for many years. The three men who were credited with securing the hall and obtaining the Torah and prayer books from New York were Julio Meyer, Nathan Grossman, and M. Moisés. These men not only made the necessary arrangements, but two of them conducted the services, Mr. Meyer acted as president of the congregation and Mr. Grossman as the cantor. The men in attendance participated by reading from the Torah and leading the various prayers.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The Mexican Herald, September 17, 1904. See also The Jewish Chronicle (London), September 15, 1904.

⁴⁷ Harris, p. 12.

The Jews of Mexico City had last met in the Masonic Hall as one congregation forty-two years earlier. The 1904 meeting in the Hall contrasted with the earlier observance in at least one important aspect. In 1862 the services were held in absolute secrecy under the guise of a Masonic meeting, while in 1904 one of the leading newspapers of the city announced the approaching services in a half column article. The Mexican Herald reported that since there was "no ordained rabbi in the city, Señor N. Grossman, a Hebrew knowledgeable in the rites of the faith" would conduct the services. The Herald added the news that this gathering would be the occasion to initiate a movement to build a synagogue in the city. The editors had learned that "several prominent leaders of the Hebrews recognize the need for a permanent place of worship, and believe that the time is ripe for building a synagogue."⁴⁸

In spite of the open activity of "The Committee" and the public announcement in The Mexican Herald, the fear of being known as a Jew still had not completely disappeared in Mexico. Among some Mexican Jews a reluctance to admitting openly to Judaism persisted to the days of the modern community. Evidently "The Committee" had carefully considered the best way to make the first formally organized service a successful preliminary to a permanent congregation. They had invitations printed and mailed to the entire known Jewish population of the city. In order to protect the identity of

⁴⁸ The Mexican Herald, September 17, 1904.

those who may not have wanted to be recognized as Jews by some curious non-Jew, "The Committee" asked that the invitations be presented at the door.⁴⁹ Although the services were publicly announced, they were intended to be a private celebration limited to Jews.

In 1905 similar plans were made, and again the Herald carried the announcement. In its September 28 issue the newspaper informed its readers that the Jewish New Year observations would be held in the Masonic Hall and that attendance would be limited to the Jews in the city.⁵⁰ However, it appears that "The Committee" reconsidered the implications of such secrecy and reversed its policy the day before the holiday. Consequently on September 30 The Mexican Herald headlined an article in bold type and capital letters: "TODAY'S SERVICES PUBLIC." "The Committee" had decided not only that the services would be open to the public, but "through the pages of the Herald, issued a cordial invitation to the public generally."⁵¹ This change of policy demonstrated that in spite of the reluctance of some Jews to be identified, "The Committee" at least believed that their group constituted a Jewish community in Mexico, and therefore should establish cordial relations with the non-Jews of Mexico City.

⁴⁹ Harris, p. 16.

⁵⁰ The Mexican Herald, September 28, 1905.

⁵¹ Ibid., September 30, 1905.

At least one Jewish man in Mexico City took advantage of the change in policy to invite a distinguished guest to the Rosh Hashanah service. Of course, the Jewish man was Francisco Rivas, probably one of the most colorful personalities of Mexico City. The Mexican professor of classical languages had encouraged the organization of a Jewish congregation since 1889 when he published El Sábado in which he urged the Ashkenazic Jews of Mexico to declare their religion and form a congregation, and also announced his own small Sephardic congregation. In 1889 Rivas was convinced that Mexico was the most liberal country in the world. This liberalism, however, was confined at that time to a small core of intellectuals. By 1905 the open society of Mexico where Jews felt sufficiently secure to invite non-Jews to their publicly announced services evidenced the spread of a new liberalism into the middle ranks of the social structure. Rivas himself in 1905 was fifty-five years old, handsome and distinguished with a flowing white beard. He seemed to know everyone in Mexico City, and according to Victor Harris, "his circle of intimates embraced all the high officials, including the President and Vice President."⁵² Unlike "some French Jews with German names who would rather conceal their identity, . . . Rivas takes advantage of every opportunity to let the world know he is a Jew."⁵³ Rivas was absolutely delighted

⁵² Harris, p. 14.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 25.

with the prospect of a Jewish congregation and invited Dr. Jesús Díaz de León to be his guest at the New Year's service. He introduced Dr. Díaz de León as a teaching colleague who was "somewhat familiar with Hebrew."⁵⁴

It is doubtful that anyone in the congregation realized that they were honored with the presence of the most eminent Hebrew scholar in Mexico. Dr. Díaz de León had introduced the study of Hebrew into the curriculum of the National Preparatory School in 1903, and taught both the Hebrew language and Biblical History in the School of High Studies and, after 1910, in the National University.⁵⁵ In 1891 Jesús Díaz de León had published the first of several translations of books of the Old Testament. The publication of the Song of Songs of Solomon included an introduction which explained the Song as a nuptial hymn and as an example of an integral part of the culture of the primitive Hebrew people.⁵⁶ Both Díaz de León and his colleague, Francisco Rivas, were precursors of the new liberalism, but the contribution of the non-Jewish professor was unique in that his work introduced an appreciation of Jewish culture to Mexican students. How Francisco Rivas and Jesús Díaz de León, the two Mexican classicists, must have

⁵⁴ Harris, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Private archive of Señorita Profesora Rosa Carreón of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. See also Rafael Heliodoro Valle, "Judíos en México," Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía, LXXXI (1936), 232-233.

⁵⁶ Jesús Díaz de León, El cantar de los cantares (Aguascalientes: J. T. Pedroza e Hijos, 1891).

enjoyed the chanting of the ancient Hebrew prayers by the European businessmen of Mexico City!

An account of the services as well as a very informative description of the Mexican Jewish community of 1905 was recorded by a visiting American journalist, Victor Harris of Los Angeles. Mr. Harris was in Mexico as a direct result of the persecutions of the Jews of eastern Europe and the subsequent mass emigration to the United States. By 1905 the annual rate of Jews arriving in the United States surpassed 115,000 and Jewish committees, overwhelmed by the problem of absorbing and placing the masses, were searching for new havens of refuge.⁵⁷ At the same time, the Díaz government sent agents all over Europe seeking immigration for Mexico. The Mexican Republic, so prosperous and stable on the surface and so rich in resources beneath, seemed a promising site for the settlement of Russian immigrants. Victor Harris was sent to Mexico to investigate the prospects for Jewish immigration to Mexico. He spent seven months in the country, from August 1905 to April 1906.⁵⁸

Harris was the editor of the B'nai B'rith Messenger of Los Angeles, but he had been born in Russia and had cut short a rabbinical education in order to leave Russia to come to the United States. When the Jews of Mexico City learned of his background, they invited him to participate in the service of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. As a result, on Yom Kippur

⁵⁷ Wischnitzer, p. 99.

⁵⁸ Harris, Preface.

day, with Nathan Grossman chanting the prayers in Hebrew, Victor Harris acted as rabbi and gave a sermon in English based on the story of Jonah. Evidently a reporter from The Mexican Herald attended the service, for on the following day he commented on Mr. Harris' "unique interpretation of the story of Jonah and the whale as an allegorical lesson to the Jews to preserve their faith in the face of adversity."⁵⁹

The Herald correspondent followed the events of both the New Year and Day of Atonement observances. His accounts indicate an unabashed curiosity about "the customary services peculiar to the Hebrew race," and the "many oriental rites peculiar to the Hebrews."⁶⁰ His very unfamiliarity with the traditional observance led him to some amusing misconceptions, especially regarding Jewish eating customs. The article published on the eve of the Jewish New Year concluded with the sentence: "Several dinner parties will be given during the day by Jewish families." The announcement of the Yom Kippur service was headlined: "FEAST FOLLOWS FAST." The reporter indicated his fascination with the traditional fast by adding:

The great fast, which will begin at sunset, will last until sunset Monday, and every devout Hebrew will abstain absolutely from every kind of food and even liquids during the period. At the close of the fasting, the feasting will begin, and after 6 o'clock on Monday evening there will be many little dinner parties given by prominent Hebrews of the city to their friends.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The Mexican Herald, October 10, 1905.

⁶⁰ Ibid., September 30 and October 8, 1905.

⁶¹ Ibid., October 8, 1905

The use of the term "dinner party" suggests a formal social evening, while the customary practice is to serve a traditional meal to the family and perhaps very close friends.

What actually took place is illustrated in the account written by Victor Harris about Mrs. Grossman and her sister, Mrs. Rosenblum. Nathan Grossman was a member of "The Committee" and also the cantor of the Hebrew prayers. His wife was a "Jewish mother" with no children of her own. During the closing hours of the afternoon on the Day of Atonement, Mrs. Grossman carefully scanned the congregation, spotting the strangers in the city as well as couples who had no families of their own. After the service was completed, she invited all of these people to her home to break the fast, insisting that "it was no trouble at all." While she was busy gathering together "enough people to fill an ordinary sized restaurant," her sister hurried home to prepare a "breakfast" of the traditional foods "that mother used to make."⁶²

The guests at the Grossman home were a varied and interesting group. All had come from foreign countries and most of them had traveled from one country to another before settling in Mexico. Harris wrote that they spent a delightful evening talking of all the foreign countries they had visited. He found that the people who had lived in the various South American countries had fascinating experiences to relate.⁶³

⁶² Harris, p. 20.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

One of the guests might well have been Isaac Capón, another of the pioneer Sephardic Jews. Capón's travels before his arrival in Mexico were typical of many of the twentieth century "wandering Jews" who finally settled in Mexico. A Greek Jew from Salonika, Senor Capón had lived in Africa, Guátatemala, Honolulu, and the United States before coming to Mexico in 1904.⁶⁴

If Victor Harris enjoyed meeting the varied Jews in Mexico, they evidently responded in kind. Harris must have been very simpático, for he made friends with both Jews and Christians, and in spite of his denial of the title, he was treated with deference as a learned rabbi. He came to know the professing Jews of Mexico City as well as those of the smaller cities of the country. His account provides a great deal of information about the variety of men who had established homes in Mexico, and who were active in congregational activities at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The men chiefly responsible for organizing the annual services in 1904 and 1905 were financially well off, but they were not the wealthiest or most prominent Jews of the city. Nathan Grossman was a learned Jew who had come from Poland by way of the United States. For several years he had made his living in the interior of Mexico as a traveling salesman of eyeglasses, and after that he had been in the cleaning and dyeing business for a short period of time. By the 1890's

⁶⁴ González, "Jews in Mexico."

he was established as the owner of a jewelry store on Calle de San Francisco.⁶⁵ Mr. Grossman continued to lead the annual services as cantor for at least twenty years.

The career of Nathan Grossman is typical of the European Jews who immigrated to Mexico. Many of them started out as peddlers in small towns of the country and gradually became more respectable as "traveling salesmen." As they accumulated enough money, they might acquire a stall in a local market, and the most successful among them finally became store owners in the major cities and towns of the country.⁶⁶ Julio Meyer, who had patented an improved trouser belt in 1895, was the acting president and chief support of the Mexican Jewish community by 1905. Meyer was born in Prussia and had lived in the United States for a few years before settling in Mexico. (Possibly the Julio Meyer who had operated a calligraphy academy in the city in the 1840's was a relative whose career influenced his namesake to come to Mexico.) Meyer became a Mexican citizen in 1891, and at that time he listed his residence as Chihuahua.⁶⁷ By 1899 Meyer was established in Mexico City as a manufacturer of

⁶⁵ Interview with Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1969; advertisement for Grossman store in Germania, December 3, 1892; Harris, p. 12.

⁶⁶ González, "Jews in Mexico." For similar history of later Jewish immigrants to Mexico see Jacob Beller, Jews in Latin America (New York: Jonathan David Company, 1969), p. 22; see also Kahan, "The Jewish Community in Mexico," pp. 255-256.

⁶⁷ Cartas de Naturalización.

men's clothing and was the proprietor of a fine men's shop on Calle de San Francisco called "Camisería y Bonetería."⁶⁸

Julio Meyer, Nathan Grossman, and Francisco Rivas all fully agreed with a statement in The Mexican Herald that the Jewish community in Mexico City was "numerous, prosperous, and influential."⁶⁹ They had long wanted to establish a formal Jewish congregation and with the cooperation of the experienced American, Victor Harris, and several other interested men, they arranged a meeting for the afternoon of the joyous holiday of Simchas Torah.

On that momentous day in October, a group of five men met at the Hotel Iturbide, and rode out from there to the home of Francisco Rivas in Tacubaya. There Victor Harris read a preamble that he had prepared:

Whereas the Jewish gentlemen in the City of Mexico realize their obligation to themselves and to God, they resolve to found an organization with the purpose of celebrating occasional religious services, of helping themselves mutually in case of necessity, of assisting and protecting the foreigner, and eventually of acquiring land for a Jewish cemetery. They have met at the home of Francisco Rivas, Calle de la Luz, No. 9, Tacubaya, the twenty second of October, 1905 with the object of bringing to a head this laudable project.⁷⁰

The men who gathered at Rivas' home shared the satisfaction of accomplishment that was evidenced in the host's

⁶⁸ Figueroa Domenech, Güía General, I, 288.

⁶⁹ "A Jewish Festival," The Mexican Herald, November 25, 1905, reprinted in Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, XIV (1906), 213.

⁷⁰ Harris, p. 23.

short speech expressing his great joy on the occasion. The group agreed to formally constitute themselves as charter members of the Sociedad Emanuel, and then elected as their officers the following:⁷¹

President	Francisco Rivas
Vice President	Julio Meyer
Treasurer	Nathan Grossman
English Secretary	Victor Harris
Spanish Secretary	M. Assael
Vocales	J. E. Allalouf
	M. Spender

With optimism and enthusiasm, they toasted each other and the new congregation with a "bumper of champagne provided by Julio Meyer and plenty of other good liquor" supplied by Francisco Rivas, accompanied by delicious food prepared by Señora Rivas, and a supply of good cigars. They spent a few delightful hours in the beautiful garden of the Rivas home and then continued the celebration as the guests of Julio Meyer at a downtown restaurant.⁷²

Victor Harris, unaware of the tiny Sephardic congregation founded in that very house in 1889 and equally unaware of the congregation of oriental Jews on the other side of the Zócalo, described the "good humor and great enthusiasm" of the men who "founded the first Jewish congregation on Mexican soil."⁷³ It was a first in Mexico for Jews of such divergent backgrounds to organize as a single group. Rivas was a

⁷¹ Harris, pp. 23-24.

⁷² Ibid., p. 24.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 25.

Sephardic Jew, the descendant of marranos who had maintained their religion secretly throughout the colonial period. Meyer, Grossman, Harris, and Spender were Ashkenazic Jews from Europe and the United States, and Assael and Allalouf were Ladino speaking Jews who had arrived in Mexico since 1890.

Sociedad Emanuel initiated with such enthusiasm and noble intentions never met again. "Two French Jews with German names" went to see Julio Meyer and convinced him that the Jewish community could not support Emanuel because "they had known Francisco Rivas for more than thirty years and were certain that he was not a Jew."⁷⁴

The fate of Sociedad Emanuel demonstrates the influence of the leading French Jews of the city, among whom "the mention of smallpox or yellow fever could create no greater consternation than the suggestion to form a Jewish organization."⁷⁵

The fears of the French community seem to have been groundless. Perhaps these fears were based on the facts of Mexican life in the positivist 1870's and 1880's. Certainly, even in 1905, there was reason to hesitate to declare one's Judaism openly in the rural areas of Mexico. There seemed little basis for such reticence in the realities of life in Mexico City in the twentieth century where the Jewish community was recognized as "prosperous, numerous, and

⁷⁴ Harris, p. 25. The French Jews were Simon Weyl, the silversmith, and Señor Berlinger of the Mexican Central Railroad.

⁷⁵ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 16, 1905.

influential."⁷⁶ The experience of Victor Harris during his seven month stay in the capital attests to the acceptance Mexico City accorded to the Jewish community. Although he was not a rabbi, Harris was asked by Mr. I. J. Seligman, who represented the Guggenheim firm in the capital, to officiate at his wife's funeral. After that, Harris was honored as one of the clergymen of the city by both the Catholics and the Protestants. He was invited as a special guest when a Mexican priest was awarded a papal honor at the Church of Loreta, and was seated with the clergy at the funeral of the American consul-general who had been killed in an accident.⁷⁷ Based on his personal experience, the American journalist could only conclude that the Mexicans would be receptive to a synagogue and a permanent rabbi in the capital. Harris lived at the YMCA and became a member of that organization, thoroughly enjoying the people and the activities. The only unkind remark about Jews that he heard during his residence in Mexico was made by a drunk American.⁷⁸

Victor Harris spoke with the unpopular Vice President of the Mexican nation, Ramón Corral, regarding the possible immigration of Russian Jews to Mexico. The Vice President assured him that the laws of Mexico were exactly the same as those of the United States, guaranteeing complete freedom and

⁷⁶ The Mexican Herald, November 25, 1905.

⁷⁷ Harris, pp. 30-31.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 16, 35-37.

protection to people of all religions. Harris spoke also to an official of the Department of Development who told him of the availability of terrenos baldíos, the unoccupied government owned lands which were for sale to any organization that would make them productive. Harris was left with the impression that Mexico certainly did offer possibilities for Jewish agricultural settlements in the rural areas as well as for commercial development in the cities.⁷⁹

Rabbi Zielonka's impressions three years later were very much the same as those of Victor Harris. Both men noticed that while the influential French Jews opposed the formal organization of a congregation, the American Jews in the city, the Turkish Jews, and the Europeans who had spent any time in the United States, were the men who most felt the need for a synagogue.⁸⁰ This observation is interesting in view of the experiences of the three leaders whose histories are most complete.

Julio Meyer, originally from Germany, and Nathan Grossman, from Poland, had both migrated to Mexico by way of the United States. Francisco Rivas, the Mexican born Jew from Yucatán had spent several years in New York as a student.⁸¹ Rivas' experience in the United States certainly must have had some influence on his dedicated efforts to bring open Jewish worship to Mexico.

⁷⁹ Harris, pp. 38-39.

⁸⁰ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 16, 1908.

⁸¹ "Don Francisco Rivas," El Universal, October 17, 1924.

The American Jews who lived in Mexico, although citizens of the United States, were active supporters of the incipient community. Among this group were members of some of the most prominent families of American Jews. All of German origin, these families are referred to in a popular contemporary book as "Our Crowd."⁸²

There was I. J. Seligman of the famous merchandising and investment house family. Seligman was a relative of the Guggenheim's and headed the Mexico city office of the giant mining firm. Dr. Lawrence E. Speyer had been a practicing dentist in Mexico in the 1890's. By 1904 he represented the family banking firm of New York, London, and Paris that held the 1904 Mexican bond issue. Max and Louis Loeb, who operated a china and glassware store, were cousins of Oscar Straus, the founder of Macy's department store.⁸³ One of the most popular Jewish men of the city among "all classes, irrespective of race or creed" was a physician, Dr. Sidney Ulfelder. He was an American born Jew who had lived in Mexico since before 1900, practicing medicine and helping many needy people. In fact a Mexican journalist wrote in 1921, "What he has done for the stranded in Mexico over the last twenty years would fill a man-sized volume."⁸⁴

To explain the greater willingness to profess their religion among those who had lived in the United States, we

⁸² Stephen Birmingham, Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁸³ Harris, pp. 18, 19, and 26.

⁸⁴ Gonzáles, "Jews in Mexico."

must first understand the meaning of the phrase "freedom of religion" in the United States, France, and Mexico. Both Mexico and France were historically Roman Catholic countries ruled by Catholic monarchs. The revolution which renounced the French monarch also renounced the Roman Catholic Church. In Mexico the anti-clerical revolution succeeded in 1853 and the last attempt at monarchy was defeated ten years later. Freedom of religion in both France and Mexico was widely interpreted as meaning the freedom to be an atheist. In the United States freedom of religion was a Constitutional guarantee in a religious, Protestant country. In this country, however, freedom of religion historically was not generally interpreted as the freedom to be an atheist before the present on-going social revolution. Freedom of religion in the United States has always guaranteed protection to every variety of worship, but not specifically to atheism.⁸⁵ Over the two thousand years of the diaspora, the Jewish people have learned to adapt to any culture in which they have lived. Thus, if the United States was a religious country, the Jews in the United States, to a large degree, maintained their religious affiliation.

Many of the Jews in the United States felt very strongly about the importance of organized religion. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that in 1908 the Union of American Hebrew

⁸⁵ A recent controversial article illustrates this ambiguity in the meaning of "freedom of religion" in the United States. See B. B. Beach, "What Religious Liberty is Not," Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom, LXV (Washington, D.C., May-June 1970), 10-12.

Congregations, concerned that a community as large as that of Mexico City had no organized congregation, sent Rabbi Martin Zielonka to lend a helping hand.⁸⁶

Rabbi Zielonka soon learned of the abortive Emanuel congregation of 1905, and in view of the opposition of the influential French Jews and the diversity of background of the rest of the community, he concentrated his efforts on the organization of a mutual benefit society. This project began on a small scale with an organization meeting in a room at the Masonic Hall on June 24, 1908. Of the twenty men who attended the meeting, the majority were the very men who had met so optimistically at the Rivas home just three years earlier. This time they organized the Sociedad de Beneficencia Alianza Monte Sinai, named in honor of Rabbi Zielonka's temple in El Paso.⁸⁷ The first officers were L. B. Speyer, President; A. Assael, Vice President; Nathan Grossman, Secretary; and J. B. Cain, Treasurer.⁸⁸ Grossman, Assael, and Cain are on record as charter members of Emanuel; perhaps Speyer was also, as the names of the "seven other charter members" of the earlier society are not recorded.

Monte Sinai had a more successful history than its predecessor, Emanuel. By July the president reported that the Relief Society had already collected over six hundred dollars.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB, XXXIII, 429.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 430.

⁸⁸ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 30, 1908.

⁸⁹ L. B. Speyer to Rabbi Martin Zielonka, July 8, 1908 in "Mexico, Miscellaneous Material on Mexican Jewry," AJA.

The new organization operated with the cooperation of the active community and the silent support of the wealthy French Jews. The Frenchmen, who considered themselves "cosmopolitan humanitarians," were willing to accept the responsibility of helping the unfortunates of the community so long as their names were not publicly mentioned in connection with a Jewish organization.⁹⁰

The relief society did fulfill a real need in the community. Those who were well-off had for years taken care of the less fortunate by taking them into their homes, by starting them off with stocks in trade, or with loans. A stranded Jew or needy family was often helped by a collection taken up in the Jewish owned shops on Calle de San Francisco and Cinco de Mayo. In cases of illness, a poor patient was usually taken to the English or American hospital, and the expenses paid by individuals or by a purse made up among other Jews.⁹¹

By 1908 the Jewish population of the capital city was estimated at up to 10,000 people, the majority of whom were foreign businessmen living in Mexico. By this date, in spite of the varying backgrounds of the Jews in Mexico, the community had established formal and informal institutions to meet their social and religious needs. Indeed, the Jewish community in 1908 was recognized as a social entity in Mexico for the first

⁹⁰ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico." July 30, 1908.

⁹¹ González, "Jews in Mexico."

time by a Spanish language newspaper. El Imparcial, the leading government supported daily of the capital, announced in a front page article that "Los Judíos tendrán una sinagoga."⁹² This was a notable change from 1905 when The Mexican Herald carried at least five articles on the Jewish community while the Spanish language newspapers completely ignored the existence of Jews in Mexico.⁹³

In spite of the warnings of the French Jews that anything could happen - even revolution and persecution of the Jews - when the Díaz regime came to an end, to the foreign observer Mexico had never appeared more stable and more prosperous.⁹⁴ In 1909 once again several inquiries were made by international Jewish agencies regarding the settlement of large numbers of Russian Jews.

Joseph Fels (of Fels-Naptha Soap fame) and Daniel Guggenheim, both members of the Council of the London based Jewish Territorial Organization, made separate trips to Mexico to speak to President Díaz.⁹⁵ John W. DeKay, the president of the Mexican National Packing Company, held several interviews with Díaz who declared his willingness to welcome a large-scale

⁹² El Imparcial, June 1908, cited by Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 23, 1908.

⁹³ Harris, p. 17.

⁹⁴ James Creelman, "President Díaz, Hero of the Americas," Pearson's Magazine, XIX (March 1908), 242. See also "The Mexico of 1909," The Review of Reviews, XL (October 1909), 492-493.

⁹⁵ Guggenheim's trip is reported in Hayehoodi (London), November 3, 1909, p. 13. Information on Joseph Fels is reported in Menorah Journal, VIII (August 1920), 199.

immigration of Jews "who would contribute to Mexican commerce and industry." The President of Mexico told DeKay that he had instructed his immigration agents in countries where Jews were persecuted to invite them "in the name of the President" to settle in Mexico.⁹⁶ Díaz particularly wanted to attract men skilled in the trades required by modern industry. Probably the best explanation for the small number of permanent Jewish immigrants to Mexico was offered by the President himself, for he warned that the individual who came to Mexico with no money or special skill could not live on the wage of the unskilled Mexican laborer. "A Jew would be better paid as a common laborer in the United States," declared Porfirio Díaz, echoing the conclusion drawn by every professional Jewish observer from Jacob Schiff in 1891 to Maurice Hexter in 1925.⁹⁷ This judgment was shared by the hundreds of thousands of European emigrants, Christian and Jewish, to whom "opportunity" meant "America," and "America" meant the United States.

In spite of the greater attraction of the northern republic, small numbers of Jewish immigrants continued to come to Mexico, and by 1909 the Jewish community included several Russian and Polish families as well as the German,

⁹⁶ "Mexico's Offer to the Jews," Jewish Chronicle, January 15, 1909, p. 16.

⁹⁷ Ibid. For similar conclusions cf. Adler, Jacob Schiff, II, 93; Hexter, p. 190; Harris, p. 58; Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," August 6, 1908.

English, and American, and several Sephardic families who had emigrated from Greece and Turkey.

This writer had the opportunity to meet one of the few surviving leaders of the Porfirian generation of Sephardic immigrants. Señor Rubén Mazal is a true Sephardic gentleman - aristocratic, very intelligent, and remarkably vigorous for his eighty-four years. Señor Mazal came originally from the city of Smyrna in Turkey. In his soft-spoken manner and perfect English, Rubén Mazal described the Jewish community which he found when he arrived in Mexico in 1909. For a combination of personal and political reasons, Señor Mazal decided to leave Turkey after participating in the Revolution of the Young Turks in 1907. He came to Mexico with the bride who was to be his wife for fifty-five years. On their arrival the young couple was warmly welcomed into the Jewish community, and soon had made friends among the non-Jews of the city as well. At large social gatherings, where Jew and non-Jew mixed freely, many of the earlier immigrants from western Europe still identified themselves as Frenchmen, Germans, or Englishmen, but Rubén Mazal always introduced himself as "a Jew from Turkey."⁹⁸ This in itself testifies to the liberal atmosphere of the capital in the last days of the Porfiriato.

Rubén Mazal recalled that the meeting place for the Jews of the city was the Salón Rojo, the largest movie theater in Mexico. The owner of this theater and others throughout

⁹⁸ Interview with Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1969.

Mexico was an Austrian Jew named Jacobo Granat.⁹⁹ The movie highlight of the year 1910 was the exhibition of the world championship heavyweight boxing match between the first Negro heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, and Jim Jeffries, who was known as "the great white hope." Granat purchased the film rights for \$10,000, and after first prohibiting the film, Governor Landa y Escandón finally permitted the Salón Rojo to show it, as he agreed that in Mexico "there was no anti-Negro prejudice." More than one thousand persons attended the film of the controversial and widely heralded match.¹⁰⁰

Jacobo Granat supported Francisco Madero, the first hero of the Mexican Revolution, and also acted as a catalyst in the development of the Mexican Jewish community.¹⁰¹

The men who have been introduced in this chapter all played key roles in the organization of the Jewish community in Mexico City. The community was openly established in a Mexican society that had accepted the premise that the Mexican nation was made up of various social groups with different backgrounds and different needs, all equally entitled to appropriate institutions to fill these needs. The Jews of the city had benefited from the anti-positivist atmosphere of

⁹⁹ Interview with Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1969.

¹⁰⁰ Moisés González Navarro, Historia moderna de México. El Porfiriato: La vida social, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1960), p. 791.

¹⁰¹ Jacobo Glantz, "Notas sobre la formación de la comunidad judía en México," in Israel y la diáspora en el año 5721 (1960-1961), ed. Dr. Enrique Chemilsky (México: Kehila Ashkenazi, Departamento de la Segunda Generación, 1962), p. 329.

the last decade of the Porfiriato when the single standard of "truth" and the single goal of "progress" had been discarded by the new liberals of the twentieth century.

This social revolution, which burst forth in 1910 and would continue until the demands of the long exploited masses and the rivalries of the various contenders for power were either satisfied or destroyed, would bring with it a new Mexican nationalism that could mean either destruction for minority groups like the Jews or assimilation into the new Mexican nation.

CHAPTER IV

THE OUTBREAK OF REVOLUTION TO THE CONSTITUTION OF 1917

The first leader of the Mexican Revolution was not really a revolutionary; he was not even a true social reformer. Francisco Madero was an idealistic and somewhat naive landowner from the north whose chief interest was the establishment of political democracy in Mexico after the Díaz regime came to an end. When in 1908 the seventy-eight year old Porfirio Díaz told an American correspondent that he had served long enough and would welcome a genuine opposition and democratic government in 1910 - the year of the next presidential election - Madero took the dictator seriously.¹ Not yet dreaming of becoming a revolutionary, Madero published a little book entitled La sucesión presidencial in which he urged that the Mexican people have a choice in selecting their next president. At this time Madero began to make speeches urging "Effective Suffrage - No Reelection." By 1910 Madero was a declared candidate for the presidency and was arrested by the Díaz government. Obtaining release from prison through family connections, he made his way to San Antonio, Texas where he published the Plan of San Luis Potosí which advocated political reform and a few social reforms, as well as calling for general revolution.

¹ James Creelman, "President Díaz, Hero of the Americas," Pearsons Magazine, XIX (March 1908), 242.

Revolution began in Mexico on November 20, 1910, and by the time Porfirio Díaz renounced the presidency and sailed away to Europe at the end of May 1911, most of the foreigners had also left the country. The general exodus included most of the European and North American Jews. Some returned to Europe, many made their way to Texas and other parts of the United States, while a great many emigrated to Cuba.²

In spite of the departure of the foreign Jews and a few others who had been close to the Díaz government, the early stages of the Revolution did not seriously disrupt the lives of the core group who remained.³ It did, however, eliminate the source of much of the financial support of the Mexican Jewish community and reduced the professing Jewish population to no more than a few hundred families who were permanent residents of Mexico. The few families who felt a sense of responsibility for the religious and social needs of the Jewish people served as the nucleus of the community which continued its gradual development throughout the turbulent years of revolution. Many of these families had lived in Mexico since the nineteenth century; others had arrived during the last years of the Díaz regime. They did not think of themselves as foreign businessmen temporarily in Mexico, but rather as Jews, who, for better or for worse, had made Mexico their homeland.

² Seymour B. Liebman, "They Came with Cortés," Judaism (New York, Winter 1969), p. 98.

³ Interview with Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1969.

When the Revolution began, Jacobo Granat, the wealthy Jewish owner of the Salón Rojo and a chain of theaters throughout the country, left his business in charge of his family and took an active part in the rebellion on the side of Francisco Madero. He supported Madero both financially and by offering his theaters as forums for Madero's campaign speeches. After Madero's triumphant march into Mexico City and subsequent election as President, he expressed his appreciation of Granat's support by granting his request for permission to purchase land for a Jewish cemetery.⁴ A burial ground of their own had long been the desire of the religious members of the Jewish community. In 1912 Granat - the "movie-business revolutionary" - bought a plot of land in Tacuba which would become the first Jewish cemetery in Mexico.⁵

During the years of the Madero presidency, which lasted from November 1911 until Madero was deposed and subsequently murdered in February 1913, the Jewish community in the Mexican republic continued to grow both in terms of actual numbers and internal organization. In June of 1912, while Madero was in office and the capital city relatively peaceful, an unusual meeting was held by the Jews of Mexico.

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Seymour B. Liebman, "Los Judíos en la historia de México," Cuadernos Americanos, XXVI (Jan. - Feb., 1967), 155-156. Also, Harry Sandberg, "Jews of Latin America," AJYB 5678 (1917), pp. 81-82.

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Jacobo Glantz, "Notas sobre la formación de la comunidad judía en México," in Israel y la diáspora en el año 5721 (1960-1961), ed. Dr. Enrique Chemilsky (México: Kehila Ashkenazi, Departamento de la Segunda Generación, 1962), p. 329.

The purpose of the meeting was to unite all the Jews of the Mexican nation into a single mutual benefit organization. Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Syrians, and Arabs from Mexico City and from all the provinces were invited to attend the meeting.⁶ Jews had been living in the smaller cities of Mexico as long as they had in the capital, and most of the residents of the interior were in contact with the Jews of Mexico City.⁷ All of them were asked to cooperate in 1912, just as they would be called upon once again to help the settlement of the immigrants in the 1920's.

The organizers of the 1912 meeting were Isaac Capón from Greece, Selim and Francisco Cohen from Damascus, and Jacobo Granat from Austria, respectively representing the Sephardic, Syrian, and Ashkenazic Jews of Mexico. With the support of the dedicated Nathan Grossman and several other men from Mexico City and the interior, the group reconstituted the Sociedad de Beneficiencia Alianza Monte Sinai, which had evidently been completely inactivated by the departure of its foreign members. Jacobo Granat was elected President of the

⁶ Francisco Pedro Gonzáles, "Jews in Mexico," American Israelite, March 31, 1921.

⁷ Victor Harris, The Jews in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p. 60; Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite, June 25, 1908; Jacobo Glantz, p. 329; Letter from William Mayer to Rabbi Martin Zielonka dated December 22, 1936 in "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau, Correspondence and Reports of Rabbi Martin Zielonka referring to activities of the Bureau," Microfilm #600b will be cited hereafter as "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence." These families included the Nordwalds, Krakauers, and Picards of Chihuahua; Gustav Mayer of Orizaba; Ripstein and Blitz of Guadalajara; Smeke, Jaco, Hahn, and Bijman of Tampico; Kopel of Mazatlán.

newly organized society and J. B. Shikias was chosen to be Vice President.⁸ Granat donated the tract of land he had purchased in Tacuba to Monte Sinai and in 1913 - for the first time in the 392 year history of the Jewish people in Mexico - they established their own cemetery.⁹

In spite of the ecumenical intentions of its founders, Monte Sinai soon became the congregation of the Jews of the Middle East.¹⁰ This change did not occur because of any preconceived plan. The history of the Jews in Mexico has been consistently characterized by its pragmatic nature, with each step toward community organization taken as a reaction to a current situation. For example, the 1912 meeting had been called in order to provide for the needs of a diminished community that might face serious problems in a land of revolution. The Damascus Jews - the most numerous of the oriental Jews - came to dominate Monte Sinai because the Syrian and Turkish population grew rapidly during the revolutionary years.

⁸ González, "Jews in Mexico," This article includes the names of some of the charter members of Monte Sinai. Aside from a few of the names mentioned in note 7, Mexico City residents who participated included Carlos Mizrachi, whose family now operates a bookstore on Avenida Juárez, S. Schutz, M. Wolfowitz, Wolfenstein (a photographer), and A. Morris. A letter to the author from Chaim Lazdeiski, Executive Director of the Comité Central Israelitade México dated March 24, 1970 citing an article published on the fiftieth anniversary of Alianza Monte Sinai in 1962 adds the names of Sam Morrison, León Goldman, and León Weinstock, all Ashkenazic Jews, as well as Teófilo Sacal and J. Kalach among other Jews originally from Damascus.

⁹ Glantz, p. 329.

¹⁰ Ibid. See also Martin Zielonka, "The Jews in Mexico," CCYB, XXXIII (1923), 431.

In spite of the Mexican Revolution, the oriental immigration which had begun about 1895 or 1900 increased by thousands from 1910 through 1925. Compared to the poverty and danger of life in the Turkish Empire and the ravages of World War I with its slaughter of Armenians and other unfortunates, the Mexican Revolution seemed a mild risk to face.¹¹ Some of the new arrivals soon found, however, that war in Mexico could be every bit as violent as war in the east. The immigrant peddlers led miserable existences and, hampered by their ignorance of the Spanish language, the Arab speaking newcomers faced added dangers. In fact a few of them were shot as suspicious characters by the revolutionary armies.¹² Nevertheless, the immigrants continued to come to Mexico from Turkey and Syria at an increasing rate that reached its peak in 1924.¹³ The exact numbers of immigrants from the Turkish Empire are unavailable, but one source estimates that by 1921 there were 6,000 oriental Jews in

¹¹ J. L. Weinberger's report of B'nai B'rith activities in Mexico, 1930 in "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau: Correspondence of Rabbi Martin Zielonka, Joseph L. Weinberger, et al. relating to the activities of the Bureau, 1929-1947," AJA, Microfilm No. 841.

¹² AJYB (1917), pp. 80-81. See also Hebrew Standard (New York), May 12, 1916; cf. Letter from Cyrus Adler, President of the American Jewish Committee to the Secretary of State in Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1916 (Washington, D. C: Government Printing Office, 1925), File No. 312.67/69, p. 799.

¹³ Tovy Meisel, "The Jews in Mexico," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences, III (1948), 299.

Mexico and that by 1929 the number had doubled to 12,000.¹⁴ This figure agrees with a 1925 estimate of 8,000 oriental Jews in Mexico City.¹⁵ The Turcos struggled along in miserable poverty and outright danger as the various revolutionary armies roamed the countryside, sacking towns, burning haciendas, and shooting suspicious looking foreigners - all in the name of "land and liberty."

From Madero's first days in office, plots and counterplots by revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries challenged his precarious and unorganized government.

Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the Indians and peasants of the state of Morales, located to the south of Mexico City, had taken up the cause of restoring the traditional peasant lands, confiscated over the years by the hacendados. Chosen in 1909 by the peasants of his native village to represent their documented claims to land and water rights, Zapata dedicated the remaining years of his life to this project. He led his loyal Indian troops in the early months of the Revolution, setting fire to haciendas and capturing towns in a campaign of terror that continued even after Madero's triumphal entry into Mexico City. Although Zapata signed a truce with Madero based on the new president's promise of justice for the Indians, after a year in office Madero had taken no action to implement his promise to the peasant leader.

¹⁴ Report of J. L. Weinberger, AJA.

¹⁵ Maurice B. Hexter, "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (1926), 189.

In November 1912, Zapata proclaimed the Plan of Ayala in which he explained his goals. Zapata and his followers resumed their fight, this time against Madero. The young peasant leader, dedicated to the achievement of "land and liberty" for the peasants of Morales, fought all the revolutionary governments until his violent death in 1919.¹⁶

Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa - the men who were later to become the leading contenders for leadership of the Revolution - remained loyal to Madero throughout his presidency. However in the north, General Orosco declared against the President, Meanwhile the most dangerous challenger, General Victoriano Huerta, had been placed in charge of the defense of the capital city by the naive president. Madero did not actually trust Huerta - the ex-Díaz general had been consigned to the inactive list for months - but there really was no other general available to trust, because most of the military had openly declared that they would never support a civilian president. The few who had demonstrated loyalty to Madero had either been killed or were off fighting either Zapata in the south or Orosco in the north.

Huerta, with the support of the ex-president's nephew Felix Díaz, and an old soldier from the north, Bernardo Reyes, had conspired against President Madero for months. With the collaboration of Henry Lane Wilson, the United States Ambassador

¹⁶ For a detailed study of the Zapata revolution see John Womack, Zapata and the Mexican Revolution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

to Mexico, plans were finalized at the American Embassy and a bloodless coup carried out. Madero was taken prisoner "for his protection," with assurances and promises of "safe conduct" out of the country. But within a few days of their capture, President Madero and his Vice President, Pino Suárez, were shot under the pretext of the ley fuga (law of flight), the legal excuse for assassination that had been used so frequently by the Díaz government to rid itself of anyone suspected of disloyalty. Thus, Huerta justified the dual murder by claiming that Francisco Madero and Pino Suárez had tried to flee the prison.

Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa - whose real name was Doroteo Arango - fought as Constitutionalists to avenge Madero's death and bring down the usurper Huerta. When Huerta's inevitable fall came in July of 1914, Villa and Carranza split, each disclaiming any desire for the presidency, yet each determined to operate autonomously.¹⁷

Pancho Villa, the ex-bandit turned champion of the common people, swept through the northern provinces with his "Invincible Army of the North." He became the folk hero of the Revolution, winning supporters in Mexico and sympathy in the United States, where the New York Times called him "The Robin Hood of Mexico."¹⁸ Anita Brenner, well-known for

¹⁷ There are several excellent books on the Mexican Revolution. One of the newest for the general reader is William Weber Johnson, Heroic Mexico (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1968).

¹⁸ New York Times, December 14, 1913, 2:4.

her photographic and narrative histories of the Revolution (and less well-known for her service on behalf of the Jewish immigrants in the 1920's), described Villa's troops camped outside her father's ranch, with their gaunt ragged women and squalling babies. For months the Brenner cattle provided food for the troops and milk for the begging women and children. When the battle that would force Villa back to the hills raged virtually on their doorstep, the Brenner family fled across the border.¹⁹

There was no anti-semitism attached to the Mexican Revolution - the enemies were the rich hacendados and the foreign exploiters of Mexican labor and resources, and the victims were any unfortunates who happened to stray into the paths of the furious armies. In Mexico City the Jewish community remained relatively untouched, continuing their daily business and communal activities, while the Turcos struggled to stay alive in the interior.

Jewish men did participate in the Mexican Revolution, and many of their names are recorded in the remarkable descriptive guide to the 259 volumes of revolutionary documents in the Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs.²⁰ These

¹⁹ Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Altars (New York: Payson and Clarke, Ltd., 1929), pp. 207-209. Also Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," The Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), 332.

²⁰ Berta Ulloa, Revolución mexicana 1910-1920, Guía para la historia diplomática de México, No. 3 (México: Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, 1963).

were not, however, the men of the established Jewish community. For the most part they were pure adventurers like Sam Dreben, characterized by Rabbi Zielonka as "the fighting Jew." Dreben was a Russian immigrant to the United States who joined the Mexican Revolution to serve as a colonel under Oroasco. Later he switched his allegiance to Pancho Villa and fought in the army of the bandit leader for a year. In 1916 he deserted Villa and joined General Pershing's punitive expedition against his former general.²¹

The revolutionary services of another Jewish participant proved valuable in later years to the community in Mexico. Gunther Lessing was an attorney who defended certain cases connected with Madero's activities in 1910. Lessing was treated as a personal guest of Madero on the special train that carried the first hero of the Revolution on his triumphant entry into the capital in 1911. After Madero's assassination, Lessing represented the various constitutional governments, and as legal adviser to Carranza, developed friendships with many men high in the government. In 1922 Lessing was able to be of service to the Jewish community when he advised Rabbi Zielonka regarding colonization efforts. He offered to contact President Obregón in order to assure that any colonization

²¹ Martin Zielonka, "The Fighting Jew," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, XXXI (Baltimore, 1928), 211-217. Also Ulloa, L-E-732, pp. 163-164; L-E-747, p. 192.

project on behalf of the immigrant Russian Jews would be handled properly and in a manner most likely to assure success.²²

Abraham Ratner is the most infamous of the Jewish revolutionaries, for he chose to serve the wrong side of the Revolution. Ratner came to Mexico before 1900 and served as an interpreter for the Russian legation. He established close ties with the Díaz government which he maintained when he later became the proprietor of the Tampico News. Ratner, an active counterrevolutionary and seller of munitions, was deported by Madero but was back in Mexico as Huerta's financial adviser and private secretary by 1913. When Huerta fell, the ex-dictator and Ratner left together for the United States.²³ Probably Ratner knew that Carranza had asked President Wilson for his extradition and arrest, for he never attended a planned meeting of counterrevolutionaries in San Antonio. Taking a good supply of gold bars, Abraham Ratner went off to New York where he became a respectable import-export dealer, his memories of the Mexican Revolution probably a source of dinner table conversation for years.²⁴

²² Letters from Gunther Lessing to Dr. Martin Zielonka dated November 22, 1922 and December 6, 1922 in "Correspondence and reports of Rabbi Martin Zielonka, 1921-1933," AJA, Microfilm No. 600a. Lessing is referred to in Ulloa, L-E-761, p. 193; L-E-760, pp. 253-254; L-E-852, p. 423.

²³ Ulloa, L-E-819, p. 313. See also José C. Valadés, Imaginación y realidades de Francisco I. Madero (México: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1960), II, 247.

²⁴ Letter from Morris Riskind to Sam Michaels, October 31, 1969.

After Huerta's fall from power, Villa and Carranza battled for supremacy in the Constitutionalist cause. With the support of the astute and able General Obregón, Carranza forced Villa's retreat in March of 1915. Once Villa was defeated, it was only a matter of time until Carranza was recognized as President of the Republic.

Zapata, fighting for the peasants of the south, General Obregón, representing the agrarian reformers of the north, and General Francisco Múgica, calling for labor and land reform, pressed their demands for social change until they were recognized at the Constitutional Convention at Querétaro in 1916. Although President Carranza personally had little to do with drafting the final constitution, he did sign the historic document which became the law of the land on February 5, 1917. The Constitution of 1917 was a radical document for an American Republic in 1917. It was a truly Mexican document, based on a consideration of the realities of Mexican life. Special provisions that protected the Mexican nation from exploitation by foreigners, the Indians from exploitation by the hacienda owners, and labor from exploitation by industrial and mining operators, were incorporated into the Constitution. Indian land rights would be honored and the traditional communal property institution, the ejido, would be restored; labor would enjoy the freedom to organize as well as a guaranteed minimum wage, maximum hours, and restrictions on child labor. Like all Latin American constitutions, the Constitution promulgated in Mexico in 1917

represented a goal toward which the country would work, rather than a description of existing conditions. In Mexico this meant a blueprint for continuing social change - the ongoing Mexican Revolution.

Anti-clerical provisions were also part of the Constitution of 1917. Article 130 excluded the Church from any share in public education, made marriage a civil contract, and limited political activity of priests by denying them the right to vote, hold office, or criticize "the fundamental law of the country." No church could own property and every house of worship had to be authorized by the government. The number of clergy was limited and no foreign-born clergy were permitted.²⁵ Although these provisions were intended to limit the power of the Roman Catholic Church, they also affected the Jewish population of Mexico.

Legally there could be no rabbi in Mexico, for what Jew born in Mexico could have secured a rabbinical education? Yet Francisco González reported that there were a number of rabbis in the city, most of them from "Damascus, Palestine, and other Eastern places." These men were all part-time rabbis, who made their livings as tradesmen, artisans, or Hebrew teachers. A few of the rabbis were butchers, providing kosher meat for those who wanted it. All of them officiated at weddings and circumcisions and led the daily worship

²⁵ Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 344-346.

services.²⁶ It would be many years before the European Jewish community would have an ordained rabbi as a spiritual leader. The large-scale immigration from eastern Europe would only begin in 1921, and in the 1920's even the most pious Ashkenazic Jews felt that their presence was too conspicuous and their position too precarious to risk breaking the law of the land.

At this time the Jewish population of Mexico included the developing European and oriental communities, but there were also small groups of native Mexicans who identified themselves as the heirs of colonial Judaizers. To these followers of the Jewish faith, the versatile Francisco Rivas was known as "Rabbi." The "Indian Jews," who are really no more or less Indian than the general Mexican population, became known to the outside world about 1910. Seymour B. Liebman believes that their claims to Jewish ancestry are false and that these Indian Jews are recent converts from a Christian sect, the Iglesia de Dios.²⁷ Although this origin is admitted by the congregation in Mexico City, the origins of other small groups in scattered Mexican villages is more obscure.

As early as 1889, Francisco Rivas wrote:

There are isolated villages in Mexico far from the populous cities where the inhabitants still preserve the purity of their race and their primitive language and customs. They adore Jehovah, believe that He created the Universe, marry among themselves and preserve the ancient faith. . . .

²⁶ Francisco Pedro González, "Jews in Mexico."

²⁷ "The Mestizo Jews of Mexico," American Jewish Archives, XIX (November 1967), 144-174.

These monotheists preserve the Sabbath, hold services where the head of the family reads to them from the Sepher in Hebrew and then translates into Spanish. . . .²⁸

Rivas' interest in these isolated communities had continued through the years. He did not view the Constitution of 1917 as did most Mexicans. While Article 130 tended to inhibit religious organization and certainly was viewed as a threat by the Catholic Church, it was seen in a different light by the liberal idealist. Francisco Rivas interpreted the new Constitution as a social document recognizing and protecting the rights of the various groups within the Mexican nation. In particular the recognition of the Indian communities seemed to Rivas to offer the opportunity for the long isolated heirs of colonial Judaizers to practice their faith openly. In 1917 he undertook the project of uniting the scattered communities of "Indian Jews" in the country into a single organization.²⁹ He traveled to the little villages, assuring the inhabitants that they did, indeed, have brothers throughout the country. Enrique Tellez, the elder statesman of the village of Venta Prieta, the much visited village in the state of Hidalgo, recalled the visits of the "silver-bearded rabbi."³⁰

Under Rivas' guidance a general organization was formed which included the Mexico City congregation and the

²⁸ El Sábado, June 1, 1889 and June 15, 1889.

²⁹ "Safari into Culture," printed and unsigned in Miscellaneous File on Mexican Jewry, AJA.

³⁰ E. E. Kisch, "Indio Village Under the Star of David," in Tales From Seven Ghettos (London: Anscombe Co., 1948), p. 205.

scattered villages. The leader of the Indian Jews, who number about 3,000 members at the present date, is a Mexico City attorney named Baltasar Laureano Ramírez. Ramírez has held this position since 1917 and claims that he took over the leadership from his father who had led the Mexico City group since the nineteenth century. Señor Ramírez heads the congregation in Mexico City called Beth Elohim. In his role as rabbi, he visits each of the village groups twice each year. Two buildings belonging to the Indian Jews - one in Mexico City and one in Venta Prieta - are authorized as houses of worship by the Mexican Ministry of Interior. In the smaller villages the tiny congregations hold services in private homes.³¹

Seymour B. Liebman denies the authenticity of the Indian Jews on the basis of orthodox Jewish law which restricts the definition of a Jew to persons born of a Jewish mother or formally converted to Judaism.³² In recent years, however, the Jewish leadership in Mexico City has conceded a "reserved acceptance" to the Indian Jews of the Beth Elohim congregation and of the village of Venta Prieta. Jacobo Glantz, a respected leader of the Ashkenazic Jewish community as well as poet, painter, and founder of the Jewish press in Mexico City, recently said to a Mexican journalist, "Jews are not

³¹ Letter from Rabbi Baltasar Laureano Ramirez to Dr. Martin M. Weitz dated September 18, 1964 in Miscellaneous File on Mexican Jewry, AJA.

³² "The Mestizo Jews," p. 152.

missionaries. They have never sought converts. But if a group of people, no matter how small, surrounded by Gentiles, follows of its own free will the Jewish faith adhering to its laws, with its own synagogue, for me that is enough. I recognize them as Jews."³³

The Reform Jewish movement of the United States also recognizes the congregations under the leadership of Baltazar Laureano Ramírez. Reform rabbis make occasional visits to the Mexican congregation, supply them with books for the religious education of the children, and offer help to these little congregations that are out of the mainstream of Mexican Jewry.³⁴

Although the Constitution of 1917 was important in that it inspired the dreamer Francisco Rivas to organize the Indian Jews, a more significant event was the legal application of the new Constitution to the Jewish community of Mexico City. In 1918 the Alianza Monte Sinai, the central organization of the oriental community, purchased a large house on Calle Donceles where they planned to build a synagogue large enough to accommodate the growing population of Syrian and Turkish Jews. Although actual construction was not begun until a few years later, in 1918 when President Carranza signed the permit for the purchase of a Jewish house of worship under the terms of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, it was a historic moment

³³ "An Almost Lost Tribe," The News (Mexico City), December 8, 1968, p. 5-b.

³⁴ Dr. Martin M. Weitz, "Indian Jews of Mexico" (Syosset, N. Y., mimeographed, 1965), copy in Near Print file, AJA.

for the Jews of Mexico.³⁵ The occasion was doubly significant for it was the first formal recognition by the government of the existence of a Jewish community in Mexico.

Issac Capón and Solomon Cohen served as leaders of the Monte Sinai congregation for many years and maintained close ties with the Ashkenazic community that developed its formal institutions in the 1920's. In 1929 the Sephardic and Damasqueña leaders, with the cooperation of Jacobo Granat, helped a few new Polish and Russian immigrants, led by Jacobo Glantz, to establish a Jewish daily newspaper.³⁶

³⁵ González, "Jews in Mexico."

³⁶ Glantz, p. 330.

CHAPTER V
JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO MEXICO
AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN COMMUNITY

The Alianza Monte Sinai, which celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1962, was an established congregation with its own building and cemetery and an active and growing membership by the time of the Armistice that ended World War I in November 1918. Founded in 1912 through the cooperative efforts of Sephardic, Syrian, and Ashkenazic Jews, by 1918 Monte Sinai was the congregation of the general Sephardic community including Balkan, Turkish, Syrian, and North African Jews. As the immigration from the defunct Turkish Empire continued, Monte Sinai gradually came to be exclusively the congregation of the Jews from Damascus.

In 1918 more than half the Jewish population of Mexico was composed of Arabian and Turkish Jews, while the Mexico City community of Ashkenazic (central and eastern European) origin could not have numbered more than one or two hundred families.¹ The years from 1921 to 1929 would bring the immigration of thousands of eastern European Jews to Mexico and would make the Yiddish speaking group the dominant Jewish group in Mexico. With immigration beginning

¹ Francisco Pedro González, "Jews in Mexico," American Israelite, March 31, 1921. Also the Report of Henry Goulston to the I.R.O. in "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau, Correspondence and Reports of Martin Zielonka and others in connection with Jewish immigration into Mexico," AJA, Microfilm no. 600. Cited hereafter as "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence."

in 1920, the eastern European population in Mexico multiplied to well over one thousand by the end of 1921.

The repercussions of the Great War and the Russian Revolution brought incredible hardship and harassment to the Jewish people of eastern Europe. In the Ukraine alone more than twelve hundred pogroms were reported between 1919 and 1921.² Hungary and Poland were also the scenes of nationalist outbreaks that found the Jews convenient victims.

The timing of the promulgation of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 and the end of World War I in 1918 might suggest a cause and effect relationship between the social revolution in Mexico and the large-scale immigration from Europe. It would provide evidence to support the "new left" interpretation of history to state that the Mexican Revolution rid the country of foreign exploiters and raised the standards of the laboring classes, thus making Mexico attractive to the European immigrant searching for a place to invest his labor rather than his money. Such was not the case. As James W. Wilkie has demonstrated in his penetrating and original study, the take-off point for the Mexican economy occurred during the Cárdenas regime, and rapid social change and economic development came only after 1940.³ In 1925 just

² Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), p. 714.

³ The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change since 1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), see especially pp. 263-267 and 277.

as in 1905 "the Jewish artisan or workman could not exist on the wage level of the native."⁴

As a matter of fact money wages in Mexico had remained practically at a standstill from 1794 when Alexander von Humboldt made his estimate until the outbreak of revolution in 1910.⁵ In 1925 the Mexican wage was only one-fourteenth that of the North American worker.⁶ Considering that fourteen days work yielded to the worker in merchandise what an American laborer earned in one day, it would seem that the European immigrant did not choose Mexico because of economic opportunity.

Nor did the thousands of Jews pour into Mexico in response to genuine expressions of welcome from the Mexican government. In 1922 President Obregón had assured Jewish organizations in the United States that Mexico would welcome Jewish immigration, and in 1924 President-elect Calles issued a long statement to the New York Daily News in which he said:

. . . The Government of Mexico is prepared to welcome most warmly the immigration of Jews from eastern Europe to engage here in agricultural as well as industrial pursuits. . . . The policy of my government will be to welcome all Jews who wish to come to settle in Mexico and to accord them protection and help. . . .⁷

⁴ Maurice B. Hexter, "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (New York, 1926), 281.

⁵ Frank Tannenbaum, The Mexican Agrarian Revolution (New York: Macmillian Co., 1929), p. 144, citing Revista Quincenal Organo del Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, No. 10 (May 1925), pp. 15-18.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 150-151, citing Estadística Nacional, May 31, 1925.

⁷ The Obregón statement is printed in "Review of Contemporaneous History," Central Conference of American Rabbis

Jews came to Mexico by the thousands from Russia and from Poland and from Lithuania, not because opportunity beckoned in Mexico, nor because they had been invited by the Mexican president, but they came to Mexico because the open door to the United States was abruptly closed to them. In 1921 the United States Congress passed the first restrictive immigration law in the history of the nation that had welcomed the "tired and poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The American Immigration Quota Act of 1921 established an annual quota limiting the number of immigrants admitted annually to three percent of the total of foreign born of each nationality in the United States on the basis of the census of 1910.⁸ The Johnson Act of 1924 further restricted Jewish immigration by lowering the annual quota to two percent based on the census of 1890.⁹

Desperate emigrants from Russia and Poland, unable to board ships for the United States, gathered in the European ports where they were easy prey for steamship agents who assured

Year Book (hereafter abbreviated CCYB), XXXII (1922), 273; President-elect Calles' statement was published in the New York Daily News, August 9, 1921 and reprinted by Hexter, p. 279.

⁸ American Immigration Quota Act of 1921 is cited by Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration since 1800 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), p. 151. The quoted line is from the poem inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The author was Emma Lazarus, a Jewess of Sephardic origin, born in New York in 1849. Her words expressed an emotional symbolism attached to the statue that was never intended by the government of the donor nation, France, nor the recipient, the United States.

⁹ The Johnson Act of 1924, cited by Wischnitzer, p. 154.

them that if they went to Mexico, it would be an easy matter to cross the border into the "promised land."¹⁰

From the first months of 1921 every German and French and Dutch passenger liner that entered the port of Veracruz carried from five hundred to a thousand Jews. These Jews came without money and without skills. Most of them would have been barred from the United States by inability to pay the Head Tax even before the passage of the 1921 Quota Act. Some set off for the Texas border; the majority, however, wandered the streets of Veracruz and Mexico City, "destitute of any means of living, in health conditions defying description, in dire need of assistance, and in utmost despair."¹¹

The Jewish community in Mexico City was inadequate in both numbers and resources to cope with the problem. Three different committees were formed and subsequently dissolved in efforts to help these poor, unskilled, Yiddish speaking immigrants who really wanted to be in the United States. The first committee had been organized by the Syrians immediately after World War I. The other nationality groups had been reluctant to cooperate under Syrian leadership, particularly since before 1920 the majority of immigrants were still coming from Turkey and Syria. The Syrian group gave way to a second, short-lived committee which had been delighted to

¹⁰ Report of Henry Goulston to the I.R.O. in "B'nai B'rith Correspondence," AJA. See also Maurice R. Davie, World Immigration with Special Reference to the United States (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936): p. 400.

¹¹ Hexter, p. 189.

surrender the responsibility to the third immigrant aid society, La Asociación Para La Ayuda de Los Inmigrantes.¹²

The last named society was said to be composed of German Jews who were able to function for several months with the silent partnership of the richest Jews in the city - the French. The French Jews, exactly as they had in 1908 when Rabbi Zielonka organized the first Monte Sinai, refused to have their names mentioned openly in connection with a Jewish cause, but had each contributed a stated amount each month.¹³ The limited funds and the small number of volunteers were simply inadequate to the task. The aid society, overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem and powerless to solve it, called out for help.

The Asociación Para La Ayuda de Los Inmigrantes addressed a sharply worded and desperate appeal to sixty-eight well-established Jewish residents of Mexico City. The sixty-eight men who received the printed letter represented all of the cultural groups that made up the Jewish population of Mexico City. The following letter, translated but in its original format, demonstrates the financial, emotional, and physical exhaustion of an aid society on the verge of disbanding.

¹² Report of Henry Goulston, AJA.

¹³ Ibid.

IT WILL DO NO GOOD TO PRETEND NOT TO SEE THE MISERY AND TO TURN YOUR BACKS ON THOSE OF YOUR OWN FAITH; IT WILL DO NO GOOD TO HEAR THOSE WHO ARE CALLING OUT AND NOT TO HEED THEIR ANGUISHED CRIES. YOU WILL HAVE TO DO IT SOONER OR LATER; YOU ARE MORALLY OBLIGED BY THE REFUGEES in case this society is disbanded for lack of resources and people, and abandons the immigrants to the mercy of public philanthropy.

The few members of the present organization in the last two months have come to the end of their resources and their physical strength, have spent all the funds gathered up til now, and see the necessity of abandoning the entire project and disbanding the society. They are unable to take any more steps, material or moral, to continue their labors if other able people do not come to their aid. The junta directiva is about to disband and to disorganize the "sociedad de Socorro" if its members are not replaced by other people capable of continuing the work.

AS A LAST RESORT LEFT TO US WE DIRECT TO YOU THIS APPEAL TO UNITE INTO AN ORGANIZATION AND FOR THIS PURPOSE TO ATTEND A MEETING which we propose be held:

the day Thursday, May 12, 1921

at 8:30 p.m. (hora oficial)

the address 6 a de Donceles, #141

where we shall present the proof of the preceding and will give you details on the situation which you must alleviate and resolve as soon as possible.

Asociación Israelita de México
para la Ayuda de los Inmigrantes¹⁴

.....
14

A copy of the letter, headed "Carta de Asociación

There is no record of the names of the members of the discouraged aid society who sent out the letter nor of the exact response to their appeal. Fortunately for the immigrants, however, the timing of the call for help coincided with events that awakened the interest of Jews in the United States. The majority of the Jews who arrived in Mexico in 1921 were single men, or men who had left wives and children in Europe, planning to send for them when they acquired enough money. Many of them had accepted the word of steamship agents who had assured them that once they reached Mexico they could easily enter the United States. Immigrant Jews began to gather in the border towns of Laredo and Juárez in preparation for crossing the frontier to their long sought destination.¹⁵

Israelita de México Para La Ayuda de Los Inmigrantes," is in "B'nai B'rith Correspondence," AJA. The letter is addressed:

A Los Señores:

Alazraki	A.S. Nyssen	H.P. Lewis
Leo Assael	B.S. Pelzer	Samuel J. Lewis
J. Assael	J.N. Raphael	Manuel A. Levy
Elias Atri	Isidoro Ruff	Luis D. Loeb
Eman L. Beck	Luciano Ruff	Marcus A. Loevy
David Block	Alejandro Rueff	Mayer Franz
Alfredo Block	Herman Russek	R.S. Mazal
Julio Block	Sacal Menache	Mauricio Menzer
L. Block	Gmo. Salaschim	Isaac Mizrachi
Abe Blum	Max Wolfowitz	Alberto Mizrachi
Isaac Capón	S.W. Gottfried	J.S. Shikias
S.M. Carasso	Jacobo Granat	Schmelz Hermanos
Lous Coblentz	Isaac Helm	Julio Seckbach
Benjamin Cohen	Hauser, Zivy Co.	Miguel Sigaldi
Selim Cohen	A.C. Hieber	I. Slobotsky
Adolfo de Loew	I.H. Jacobs	F. Sourasky
Max Dreyfus	Alberto Isaak	M. Stetiner Brothers
Rafael Eskenazi	Felix Kahn	D. Strauss
Ignacio Farkas	Isidoro Kalb	Jospe Tannenbaum
Eduardo Samuel Fisher	Adolfo Kalb	M.S. Von Son
Gmo. Friedeberg	Nathan B. Kalb	Eduoardo Weyl
Federico Gerszo	Iser Kalb	Dr. Sidney Ulfelder
Dr. A.R. Goodman	Juan Levy	

¹⁵ Hexter, p. 189.

In January of 1921 four young immigrants came to Rabbi Zielonka's office in El Paso and informed the rabbi that many others would be following them into the port of Veracruz and from there into the United States. The young men believed they had perfected an easy smuggling plan which required only a small amount of money, a United States address, and an automobile license number for identification.¹⁶ Rabbi Zielonka, like the vast majority of Jews in the United States, was a dedicated American patriot. He would never, even for the most humanitarian motive, be a party to disobeying a law of the United States.

From the day that Rabbi Zielonka learned that Jews were entering the United States illegally, he carried out a personal campaign to persuade the immigrants to respect the laws of the United States and return to Mexico. To the young Jews waiting for the opportunity to cross the border the rabbi advised, "Stay in Mexico." Rabbi Zielonka wrote regularly to Jewish men established in the various commercial centers of Mexico asking them to give jobs to the immigrants, find them a place to stay, and help them settle in Mexico. For example, on March 2, 1921 Rabbi Zielonka wrote to Adolph Krakauer, whose family had lived in Chihuahua since before the beginning of the century. The message stated that Zielonka was sending five "illegal entries," and asked Krakauer to

¹⁶ Martin Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB, XXXIII (1923), 432. Also "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence."

"befriend them, and find them homes and work in Mexico."¹⁷

On March 4 Krakauer sent the following telegram to Rabbi Zielonka:

Boys arrived. Placed each with a Jewish employer; by twelve noon they were all working.¹⁸

Similar requests and, with one exception, cooperative answers, fill pages of correspondence between the rabbi and established Jewish businessmen in Torreón, Veracruz, Guadalajara, and Mexico City.

In spite of the efforts of Rabbi Zielonka and many other individuals, a great many immigrant Jews attempted to smuggle themselves across the border. There is no way to know how many succeeded, but the names of more than five hundred who failed in 1921 are on the records of the United States District Courts and the Immigration Bureau in Washington.¹⁹

In March 1921 there were nineteen young Russian Jews in jail in El Paso alone, and Rabbi Zielonka received almost daily telegrams from relatives in the United States urging

¹⁷References to the Krakauer family are found in Victor Harris, The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p. 8; and in Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite, June 25, 1908. The letter from Rabbi Zielonka to Adolph Krakauer is in "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence," AJA, microfilm no. 600.

¹⁸B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence.

¹⁹Philip P. Sachs and Martin Zielonka, "Contented Jews - From Hell Hole to Happy Home," B'nai B'rith Magazine (Chicago, 1927), p. 6. Copy in "Zielonka: Sermons, Lectures, and News Clippings," AJA.

the rabbi to do something to help each cousin or nephew or brother-in-law. The rabbi's involvement in the case of Hersh Leven began with the following exchange of telegrams, typical of many such exchanges between anxious relatives and the spiritual leader/legal adviser, Martin Zielonka:

San Francisco 2/6/21

Rabbi Zielonka:

Hersh Leven caught crossing Mexican border and arrested. Please investigate and let us know what can be done. Wire collect.

J. Ascheim

El Paso 2/6/21

J. Ascheim:

Nothing can be done for Leven. Wisest thing for him to do is plead guilty. Am writing statement of facts.

Rabbi M. Zielonka²⁰

The following day the rabbi wrote a letter to Mr. Ascheim telling him that he had met Leven in Mexico and advised him to stay there. Zielonka had made frequent visits across the border to try to convince "these boys" that it was illegal to cross the border, but his patriotic regard for the laws of the United States was not shared by the youthful adventurers. As a result Leven was one of nineteen sentenced to thirty days in the El Paso jail. The young outlaws were then turned over to the immigration authorities for deportation either to

²⁰ "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence," micro-film No. 600.

Europe or to Mexico. Rabbi Zielonka assured Mr. Ascheim that he was appealing in behalf of the illegal entries for a Mexican decision.²¹

One of the other young men whose family appealed to Rabbi Zielonka was Joseph Weiss who had come from Hungary. The rabbi sent telegrams to Washington urging the authorities to deport Weiss to Mexico rather than to Europe. A congressman wired, asking the Department not to deport Weiss at all, as his family in the United States would assure his good conduct and gainful employment in this country. One return wire read, "Regret impossible to do anything." Another, signed C. S. Haldworth, informed Rabbi Zielonka that he (Haldworth) had gone to the Director General of Immigration who had said he would try to have Weiss deported to Mexico rather than to Europe. Finally, on May 29, Fulton Brylowksi of the Department of Immigration, informed Rabbi Zielonka of the disposition of the cases. His letter read:

Although it was the original intention of the Bureau of Immigration to consider the cases appended "en bloc," through some misunderstanding they have been taken up separately and the following orders of deportation made:

Ordered deported to Mexico: Five Jewish men
(Hersh Leven included)

Ordered deported to port of
embarkation: Eleven Jewish men
(Joseph Weiss in-
cluded)

²¹ Ibid.

The letter concluded with the assurance, "None of these people will be returned to Russia. . . . Yours very truly, . . ." ²²

For Rabbi Zielonka and many other American Jews it was heartbreaking to stand by as so many young men were shipped back to Europe. Yet it was essential to uphold the laws of the United States. This conflict plus the possibility that the illegal acts of the European Jews might reflect on the reputations of American Jews led Rabbi Zielonka to ask the International Order of B'nai B'rith (I.O.B.B.) to undertake a project aimed at creating "contented Jews" in Mexico. ²³

The organization accepted the responsibility of "creating contented Jews" as the first essential to stopping the deportation to Europe. The national president of B'nai B'rith, Adolph Kraus, appealed to the United States Secretary of Labor, James B. Davis, asking him to direct the deportation of all illegal entries from across the southern borders to Mexico. Kraus assured Secretary Davis that the B'nai B'rith organization would furnish any necessary guarantess to the United States Immigration Bureau to ensure the Jews who were returned to Mexico of "permanent residence there, social service contacts and requirements, and assurances against any attempt to unlawfully bring any Jew from Mexico to the United States." ²⁴ The Secretary of Labor accepted the guarantee of

²² Ibid.

²³ Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," pp. 425-426.

²⁴ Sachs and Zielonka, p. 5.

the B'nai B'rith and issued instructions which saved many a young man from an enforced return voyage to Europe. After 1921 every Jew who was caught entering the United States illegally from Mexico was deported only to Mexico.²⁵

In order to fulfill the guarantee, plans were completed by the end of May for Rabbi Zielonka, as representative of the B'nai B'rith, and Henry Goulston, as representative of an affiliate organization of New York, the I.R.O. (Industrial Removal Organization), to go to Mexico to make a survey of conditions there with regard to aiding the immigrants and finding employment for them.²⁶ The I.R.O. had been organized at the beginning of the century with funds provided by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, for the purpose of removing as many as possible of the thousands upon thousands of eastern European Jews who were arriving in New York with no jobs and no money to crowd the ghetto tenements and drain the resources of Jewish charity. I.R.O., with the cooperation of B'nai B'rith chapters throughout the United States, found employment for Jewish men in the cities and small towns of the midwest and far west, and sent Jewish families to settle where they would be assured of making a living.²⁷ Many Jewish families living today in Milwaukee or Galveston or Tulsa are there because I.R.O. sent their fathers and grandfathers west in 1904 and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁶ Letter from Adolf Kraus to the I.R.O. dated May 21, 1921 in "B'nai B'rith Correspondence," AJA, microfilm #841.

²⁷ New York Times, September 27, 1903, p. 31.

1905. Rabbi Zielonka's letters to his Mexican friends asking them to place the young immigrants in jobs represents his personal I.R.O. project. After the restrictive laws of 1921, I.R.O. had little work in the United States and cooperated with B'nai B'rith in sponsoring the Mexican project.

When Rabbi Zielonka and Henry Goulston arrived in Mexico City in June 1921, they found it very difficult to persuade the Mexican Jews to attend a meeting to discuss the immigrant problem. The two Americans arrived one month after the meeting date suggested by the Asociación Para la Ayuda de los Inmigrantes. Either the meeting had been a complete failure or had not been held at all, for the Mexican Jews, completely discouraged by the failure of three committees, felt that their efforts were destined to be fruitless. Another recent event - a swindle - had decided the Jewish men in town to refuse to have anything more to do with immigrant aid. Evidently a fast talking stranger named Strauss had inveigled a few men in the community to donate large sums of money with the guarantee that he would contribute two dollars for every one he received "to aid the poor Russians." Strauss skipped town with the money, and, understandably, the community was not too receptive to any new organized effort.²⁸

These were added obstacles to the familiar reluctance of the prominent Mexican Jews to take a chance on Jewish organizations. Nevertheless the two Americans managed to hold a successful meeting at the Masonic Hall on June 30.

²⁸ Report of Henry Goulston, AJA.

Several of the Mexican men who attended voiced the opinion that their efforts should be directed to discouraging the poor unskilled Poles and Russians from coming to Mexico where they could not compete with the Mexican laborer, would be ignorant of the language, and could not be adequately helped by the small number of able and willing Jews in Mexico. Others suggested that American Jewry, so numerous, well organized, and well endowed, should take the full responsibility since the illegal entries made this as much a North American as a Mexican problem. Rabbi Zielonka and Henry Goulston each spoke to refute the arguments and managed to convince the Mexican Jews to try once more, this time with American support. By the end of the evening the Mexican Jews had established an organization, elected officers, and a few of them had volunteered to accept the responsibility of forming separate committees for employment, finance, school, and housing. The Executive Committee included the following officers and committee chairmen:²⁹

Dr. S. Ulfelder	President
Jacobo Granat	Vice President
Louis Loeb	Treasurer
Oscar Ulfelder	Secretary
Rafael Eskenazi	Chairman, Employment Committee
Marcus Joseph	Chairman, School Committee
I. H. Jacob	Chairman, Finance Committee
I. Slobotsky	} Directors
Lazard	
Isaac Capón	

²⁹ Ibid.

Almost all of the names of the Executive Committee are familiar as men who had demonstrated their interest in Jewish welfare and religious affairs since the days of Porfirio Díaz. Dr. Sidney Ulfelder was one of the most highly respected men of the community. He had proved his devotion to the needs of Jew and gentile alike, not only through his services as a physician, but as a charitable man who was always ready to help in time of need. His nephew, Oscar, shared the doctor's concern for the welfare of the immigrants.

Jacobo Granat will be remembered as the theater owner who supported Francisco Madero, donated the land for the first Jewish cemetery, served as the first President of the reorganized Monte Sinai, and would with Isaac Capón help the eastern European immigrants establish their first daily newspaper in 1929.

Rafael Eskenazi, the Chairman of the Employment Committee, had also lived in Mexico since the days of the Porfiriato. Señor Eskenazi was the dairy farmer who became a clothing merchant after his life was threatened by a village priest.³⁰ Beginning in 1921 he carried on a correspondence with Rabbi Zielonka that displayed an interest in the needs of the immigrant that went far beyond his responsibilities as Chairman of Employment. He asked B'nai B'rith to send money for special projects and requested hundreds of pounds of extra matzoh for the Passover holidays.³¹

³⁰ Letter from Morris Riskind to Sam Michaels, Oct. 31, 1969.

³¹ Letters from Rafael Eskenazi to Rabbi Martin Zielonka dated December 23, 1921 and April 11, 1922 in "Correspondence and Reports of Rabbi Zielonka," AJA.

In spite of the frightening episode of his younger days, Rafael Eskenazi's experience in dairy farming did prove of benefit to the immigrants. When Dr. Maurice B. Hexter traveled to Mexico in order to report on conditions there for the Emergency Committee for Jewish Refugees, he investigated the economic distribution of the immigrants. A member of the Committee on Employment (probably Señor Eskenazi) took him to visit six productive dairy farms in the Federal District, all operated by former eastern European Jews. The psychological impact of Russian Jews running dairy farms was invaluable in impressing the American visitor. The dairy farms provided the one optimistic note in an otherwise discouraging report on the economic situation of the Jewish immigrants in Mexico. It is very likely that Señor Eskenazi told Dr. Hexter about the threat to his life for the writer warned in his article that dairy farming was a suitable occupation for Jews only in the Federal District, and far too dangerous in the interior.³²

Isaac Capón had been one of the leading Sephardic Jews of the city since he arrived in Mexico about 1904. He had served for years as President of Alianza Monte Sinai, and as long as he lived would offer his services wherever needed.

I. H. Jacobs, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, had been a regular at the annual services since 1904. He was the owner of one of the many jewelry stores on Avenida Madero,

³² Hexter, pp. 193 and 195. Hexter did not say that the countryside of Mexico was anti-semitic, but twice in his report he stressed that Jews were only safe from bandits in the Federal District.

the pre-Revolutionary Calle de San Francisco. The committee under Señor Jacob's leadership pledged to collect fifteen hundred pesos (\$750 in 1921) each month to meet the needs of the immigrants.³³

In addition to the newly organized committee, the Y.M.H.A., which had been organized by a group of American Jews in 1917, offered its facilities as a social center for the immigrants. The Y owned a building with a large club room equipped with a pool table, a piano, a coffee bar, games, and a small library.³⁴ Although Monte Sinai had a large and well equipped building, the Yiddish speaking Russians and Poles were too different in personality and culture to feel comfortable with the Syrians.³⁵ Through the combined efforts of the aid committee and the dedicated and energetic leader of the Y, Dr. Alexander King, volunteers were able to meet the needs of the immigrants from 1921 until a sharp rise in immigration at the end of 1924 made the existing provisions once again inadequate.³⁶

The Johnson Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1924 effectively curtailed Jewish immigration to the United States. Almost immediately the effect of the new law was felt in Mexico. More than once European Jews refused

³³ Report of Henry Goulston, AJA, microfilm #600.

³⁴ Hexter, p. 274.

³⁵ Report from Anita Brenner to Rabbi Zielonka dated May 26, 1924 in "B'nai B'rith Correspondence," Micro. #841.

³⁶ Ibid.

admittance to the United States found themselves unwitting immigrants to Mexico. A mixed group from Germany, Austria, Russia, and Rumania arrived in Mexico in October 1924, their expenses paid "by a Hebrew synagogue in New York." They told Mexican authorities that when they were refused admittance to the United States they had decided to come to Mexico because of the recent statement by President Calles that he personally favored Jewish immigration.³⁷ At that same time Mexican authorities were expecting a second group of European Jews being held at Ellis Island. The Mexican government had been informed that Jews in New York had promised to pay all the expenses of the detainees until such time as they could legally enter the United States.³⁸ The majority of the immigrants, however, did not come to Mexico by way of New York, but directly from European ports. The number of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe rose to 2,131 in 1925 compared to a total of 1,850 arrivals for the years from 1921 through 1924.³⁹

Once again the work of an immigrant aid committee came to a standstill, and the facilities of the Y.M.H.A. were suddenly too small. A report was sent to Rabbi Zielonka citing the inadequacies of the existing program and suggesting that a coordinating agency was needed.⁴⁰ The B'nai B'rith

³⁷ New York Times, October 25, 1924, p. 17.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Report of J. L. Weinberger on the work of the B'nai B'rith in Mexico, 1930 in "B'nai B'rith Correspondence."

⁴⁰ Report from Anita Brenner.

responded by assuming an active role in Mexican immigrant affairs. The American organization purchased a large building and hired a full-time director. The man who took on the difficult job at considerable financial sacrifice was Joseph L. Weinberger. Mr. Weinberger had lived in Veracruz since about 1900 and was the manager of Jacobo Granat's theaters in Veracruz and Tampico. As an individual sympathetic to the problems of the immigrants he had regularly met the passenger liners as they arrived in Veracruz and had helped many of the young newcomers.⁴¹

Under Mr. Weinberger's direction, much needed medical and dental clinics were established, Spanish language classes were organized, and a loan society was financed by the sale of shares to the community. The loan society became a permanent institution, as from the first, it enabled several men to become established in business and others to bring their families from Europe. The daily activities of the Bureau included help with housing and legal advice in regard to understanding and meeting the requirements of an unfamiliar government.⁴²

While most of the case histories of people helped by the B'nai B'rith could be duplicated in the records of any social service agency, the case of Rosa Alterman seems unique.

⁴¹ Martin Zielonka, "Report of the B'nai B'rith Committee on the Mexican Bureau, 1930" in B'nai B'rith Mexico Bureau, microfilm #841.

⁴² Ibid. Also Report of J. L. Weinberger.

Mr. Weinberger reported that,

Rosa came from Constantinople in 1925. We helped her several times. Then she married a man who claimed to be an American citizen. A few days after the marriage he tried to force her into white slavery. She appealed to us and we had the man arrested twice. Each time he was freed in court, but his legal expenses must have amounted to at least \$500. Unfortunately cases of this kind are not punished severely in Mexico, and if the wrongdoer has money, he usually escapes. However, we feel that our fight has been a warning to the white slavers and we do not expect any more trouble of this kind.⁴³

The problem of the majority of the immigrants were much more prosaic than those of Rosa Alterman. Their difficulties were largely centered about earning a living in a new land where general business conditions well into 1925 were very poor. Many cases of hardship came to the attention of the B'nai B'rith organization. Mr. and Mrs. J. Cohen suffered not only poverty but great difficulty in adapting to life in Mexico. The Cohens had come to Mexico from Austria after World War I and settled in Juárez. Mr. Cohen blamed his failure to find work on the "intense hatred of the Jews in Mexico." He claimed that his wife had worked as a domestic for a Mexican family for one and half pesos a day, and had been dismissed when her employers discovered that she was Jewish.⁴⁴

Other newcomers were more successful, or perhaps just more fortunate than the Cohens. Another Yiddish speaking

⁴³ Report of J. W. Weinberger.

⁴⁴ "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence."

immigrant who had come to Mexico from Austria in 1922 was Max Borenstein. By 1923 Borenstein had established himself in Jalapa, and "on a \$50.00 capital had been able to save up \$2,000." Mr. E. Sanders of El Paso, who visited twelve cities in Mexico at Rabbi Zielonka's request, reported that young Borenstein "has a very good reputation and no doubt will make good."⁴⁵ Although Borenstein was the only young man mentioned by name, in contrast to the experience of the Cohens, Mr. Sanders found that "all of these boys are getting along nicely with the Mexican people."⁴⁶

In the interior almost every Jewish immigrant peddled dry goods or hardware. The general absence of developing industry in the 1920's made it almost impossible for a worker to secure a skilled job. With available employment limited, foreign artisans were not hired until every jobless Mexican

⁴⁵ Letter from E. Sanders to Dr. Martin Zielkonka, March 20, 1923 in "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

A recent investigation confirms this 1923 opinion, at least in regard to Max Borenstein. In 1968 when the American Jewish Committee undertook a study of the Mexicanization of Jewish immigrants, Hal Altman of the AJC conducted a lengthy interview with Borenstein's daughter, Guitl Borenstein Yoncelson, who lives with her family in the town of Valdivieso, Oaxaca. Asked if she or her family had ever experienced any anti-Jewish prejudice, Señora Yoncelson answered "Never." According to the American interviewer, Sra. Yoncelson and her husband (an immigrant from Lithuania and a close friend of the elder Borenstein) "respect and like the indigenous population of the state," while the various Indian groups of Oaxaca, "do business with people they know and trust," and "Casa Jaime (the family business) is a modern day, well respected Indian trader." Mr. Altman interviewed Max Borenstein who now lives in Mexico City. He described him as "alert, respected, and a man of dignity." Mr. Borenstein had married a Mexican woman

was employed. In addition the barriers imposed by the trade unions sent more and more Jewish men into competition with each other as peddlers.⁴⁷

In Mexico City there was more diversity in occupations, and by 1926 several immigrants had established themselves as independent artisans or storekeepers.⁴⁸ The B'nai B'rith published a listing in 1927 which demonstrates the economic distribution of the eastern European immigrants in Mexico City. This list is reproduced in Figure 6.

Figure 6.

Employment Distribution of Jewish Immigrants
in the Federal District, 1927⁴⁹

150	Installment peddlers
75	Tailor shops, men's wear (tailoring, mfg., and cleaning)
65	Booths selling hosiery and neckwaré (mostly in markets)
60	Booths and stands selling cutlery and small hardware
55	Owners of autos and jitneys (mostly bought on installment plan)
20	Shops, women's dresses (mfg. cheap dresses)
20	Boot and shoe shops (mfg.)
12	Shops, cap makers
12	Jobbers or distributors of cutlery and light hardware
11	Booths selling chinaware in market places
10	Booths and stands selling candies, lottery tickets, and miscellaneous
10	Restaurants and boarding houses
10	Dentists
10	Jewelers and engravers (small shops)
8	Doctors

who converted to Judaism and the entire family today are orthodox Jews and Zionists. (Interview on Mexicanization, May 13, 1968, in "Near print file," AJA.)

⁴⁷ Hexter, pp. 193 and 195. Also Anita Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), 338.

⁴⁸ Hexter, p. 192.

⁴⁹ "Romance of Statistics," In Sachs and Zielonka, pp. 20-21.

Figure 6 (cont'd.)

- 6 Shops, electric installation and repairs
 - 6 Dairy farms
 - 6 Stores selling auto parts and tires
 - 6 Gasoline stations
 - 5 Barber shops
 - 4 Hosiery manufacturers (small shops established during 1926)
 - 4 Manufacturers of leather purses and pocketbooks
 - 4 Grocers
 - 4 Butcher shops, kosher
 - 3 Shops manufacturing garters and suspenders
 - 3 Photo studios
 - 3 Plumbers (shops)
 - 3 Junk dealers
 - 3 Painters (shops)
 - 3 Carpenter shops and upholsterers
 - 3 Bakeries with 11 Jewish bakers
 - 3 Stores and booths selling bread
 - 3 Soda water and ice cream parlors
 - 3 Beauty parlors
 - 3 Shops handling frames, pictures, and mirrors
 - 3 Garages
 - 2 Paper bag manufacturers
 - 2 Tinnerns (shops)
 - 2 Shops, auto and machinery repairs
 - 2 Sausage makers
 - 2 Cafés
 - 2 Liquor manufacturers
 - 1 Carton box manufacturer
 - 1 Tannery
 - 1 Ladies hats
 - 1 Book bindery
 - 1 Printing shop
 - 1 Metal furniture for doctors and dentists
 - 1 Blacksmith
 - 1 Candy manufacturer
 - 1 Shirt manufacturer
 - 1 Industrial chemist making various articles
 - 1 Glue shop
 - 1 Cannery
 - 1 Drug store
-

By 1929 when the large scale immigration came to an end approximately 8,914 eastern European Jews had settled in Mexico. The most reliable estimate of Jewish immigration from

Poland, Russia, Rumania, and Hungary between 1921 and 1929 is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7.

Immigration of Jews from
eastern Europe to Mexico⁵⁰

Year	Number of eastern European immigrants
1921-1924	1,850
1925	2,131
1926	1,225
1927	1,210
1928	1,641
1929	857
Total	8,914

The rapid rise in immigration in 1925 can be attributed to the Johnson Act of 1924, while the smaller figures for the years 1926 to 1928 reflect both a policy of restricting emigration adopted by the Soviet Union and the beginnings of a protectionist policy in Mexico. Public opinion in Mexico held that the immigrants "constituted a ruinous competition for our workers, and invading all branches of activity, they are supplanting our own workers" who are forced to leave the country to search for work in the United States.⁵¹ As a result, in 1926 the Mexican government, for the first time in the history of the Republic, took steps which would gradually

⁵⁰ Report of J. L. Weinberger, AJA.

⁵¹ Manuel González Ramírez, Las instituciones sociales: El problema económico, Vol. I of La Revolución Social de México (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), p. 383.

limit immigration. Each application for entrance into Mexico was to be reviewed individually, and admission granted only if the applicant could show sufficient capital (sometimes as much as 10,000 pesos) to satisfy the government. Workers and laborers were prohibited from entering the country and professionals were required to show possession of 5,000 pesos. Permission for families of immigrants already living in Mexico was granted freely on the basis of an affidavit guaranteeing support. The 857 Jewish immigrants who entered Mexico in 1929 were almost all wives, children, and parents of Jewish men who had come to Mexico a few years earlier.⁵² The immigration restrictions which became effective in 1928 and 1929 fell most heavily on the Jews, but the motivation for the measure seems to have been strictly economic rather than anti-semitic.

Overt anti-semitism developed in Mexico in the 1930's as a direct result of the economic depression. Mexican, Spanish, German, and French commercial interests with the vocal support of certain government deputies and Nazi-inspired propaganda began an anti-semitic campaign that continued throughout the decade. The hate campaign was manifested in a movement to "Buy from Mexicans - Boycott the Jews," in several organizations and in the distribution of "hate" literature. In 1937 the Mexican Immigration Quota Law limited the number of immigrants from the eastern European countries

⁵² Report of J. L. Weinberger, AJA.

of Poland and Rumania to 100 persons while the western European nations were each assigned an annual quota of 5,000 immigrants.⁵³

Fortunately for the Jews in Mexico, by the time anti-semitism manifested itself, they were, as a whole, well settled and established economically. Between 1926 and 1930 Jewish peddlers began to disappear and Jewish owned workshops and stores began to take their place. The various small factories established also demonstrate the improvement of the economic situation of the immigrants.⁵⁴

That the immigrants from eastern Europe did succeed in establishing homes, bringing their families from Europe, and setting up businesses was a remarkable achievement in so few years. Their success can be explained partly by the general, if abortive, prosperity of the late twenties, and partly by the help afforded by the social service agencies, the loan society, and many individuals in Mexico. Primarily, however, the explanation lies in the stamina and vitality of the immigrants themselves. Centuries of persecution and hardship had prepared the Poles and the Russians to acclimate themselves to the most difficult of conditions. The immigrants also had the advantage of youth and independence. Through 1925 the majority were men unencumbered by family responsibilities and they were young enough to learn a new language,

⁵³ Solomon Kahan, "The Jewish Community in Mexico," Contemporary Jewish Record, III (June 1940), 256-259.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 256; cf. Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," p. 339.

adapt to a strange environment, and endure a few years of poverty. In 1925, of 7,045 (admittedly an inexact figure), Jewish immigrants living in the Federal District, 6,325 were men and 5,700 were between the ages of 18 and 35. The sex and age distribution of the Jewish immigrants in the Federal District is demonstrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8.

Age and Sex Distribution ⁵⁵
of Jewish Immigrants, 1925

Age Group	Male	Female
Under 14	250	250
14 to 18	175	175
18 to 25	2,450	75
25 to 35	3,250	125
35 to 50	150	75
Over 50	50	20
Total	<u>6,325</u>	<u>720</u>

There is room for speculation on the reasons for their success, but the fact remains that by 1930 the Jewish immigration to Mexico from eastern Europe and from the Balkans and the Middle East had virtually ended. The Jewish population was estimated in 1930 to be somewhat over 21,000, including almost 9,000 Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe and an estimated 12,000 who had arrived a few years earlier from Turkey and Syria.⁵⁶ These immigrants were permanent and well established residents of their adopted country.

⁵⁵ Hexter, p. 191. The Jewish immigration to the United States between 1890 and 1910 was characterized by a similar age and sex distribution.

⁵⁶

Report of J.L. Weinberger, Microfilm No. 841.

By 1930 the immigrants had also managed to establish the community structure that characterizes Jewish life in Mexico to the present day. Not one, but four major (plus three minor) and completely separate communities operate in Mexico City. The Ashkenazic community established by the Yiddish speaking immigrants from eastern Europe dominates the Mexican Jewish scene in numbers and in influence. Each community - the Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Damasqueña, and Alepino - maintains its separate religious congregations, parochial school system, and charity and social service agencies. There are also separate organizations of Jews who speak German and Hungarian, as well as an American community that recently built its own synagogue.⁵⁷

In contrast to the years of the Porfiriato, the Revolution, and even the early 1920's when every committee and organization included representatives from the various countries of Europe and the Middle East, by 1930 the Aleppo Jews had seceded from Monte Sinai to form their own more orthodox organization; the Unión Sefardí was building its first synagogue; and the Ashkenazim had established the institutions most important to them.⁵⁸

The values of the immigrant Ashkenazim were quite different from those of the oriental Jews, as demonstrated in the institutions created by the Jews who had come to Mexico

⁵⁷ Chaim Lazdeiski, "Jews in Mexico," Detroit Jewish News, September 20, 1968.

⁵⁸ Kahan, p. 261.

from such dissimilar cultures. Before they established any religious congregation the Ashkenazim had opened two schools. The first was established in 1924; then in 1925 the Colegio Israelita de México was established with two classrooms, three teachers, fifty-one students, and a curriculum that emphasized the Yiddish language and literature.⁵⁹ Colegio Israelita today enjoys the reputation as one of the leading private college preparatory schools in Mexico.⁶⁰ One characteristic of the immigrant Ashkenazim was that they were not, as a group, religious. These Jews were products of revolutionary Europe, and many were atheists and free-thinkers. Unlike the pious orientals who were supporting seventeen synagogues by 1926, the Ashkenazim by that date had formed one congregation but did not own a building.⁶¹ By 1930 the numbers of practicing Jews from eastern Europe had increased to the point where the community supported three congregations. However, to the Russians and the Poles, education and culture were far more important than the practice of formal religion. In their general disinterest in religion and emphasis on Yiddish culture the Mexican community resembled New York's lower East Side in the first decade of the century. By 1930 four of the Yiddish speaking

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

⁶⁰ Y. Ben-Meir, "Sephardic Communities in the Land of the Aztecs," Kol Sepharad (London, January 1965), p. 10.

⁶¹ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, Report of the B'nai B'rith Committee on Mexican Bureau, 1930 in "Mexico Miscellaneous file," AJA. See also Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," p. 340.

immigrants had published Jewish books in Mexico, three Jewish papers were being published, several men's and women's clubs, and a very active Yiddish Cultural Center had been organized.⁶²

A Central Committee was formed in 1938 in order to unite the Jewish population of Mexico City in an effort to combat the anti-semitic movement and to help settle the relatively small number of refugees from Hitler threatened Europe who came to Mexico.⁶³ Although in the early years the committee was composed of the presidents of the various communities, in 1947 a complete reorganization took place which assured the present domination of the Ashkenazim. The Comité Central Israelita de México is composed of thirty members, and of the thirty, fifteen represent the Ashkenazic (Yiddish speaking) community; the other fifteen seats are divided between the Sephardic, Aleppo, Damascus, German, and Hungarian groups.⁶⁴ The present Executive Director of the Comité Central recently wrote that the only interest that the separate communities share in common is support of the state of Israel.⁶⁵

A current trend toward one united community, barely discernible to the majority of Jews in Mexico, may in future years bring the end of the separate Jewish communities.

⁶² Kahan, pp. 260-261.

⁶³ Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, Vol. VII, p. 447.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lazdeiski, Detroit Jewish News, September 20, 1968.

The life experience of Señor Rubén Mazal dates from the days of the Porfiriato to the present and demonstrates the change from unity to separation and again, perhaps, to union.

Señor Mazal participated in the 1912 organization of Monte Sinai and for years attended services at the Masonic Hall chanted by Nathan Grossman from Poland. In 1929, however, when the Sephardic Jews formed their own community, Señor Mazal took his place as a leader of the Jews whose cultural background dated to medieval Spain. He served as President of the Sephardic community in 1930 and 1931. In spite of the separation of the communities, like other men who had lived in Mexico before the large scale immigration, Señor Mazal maintained his ties to the general community. One reminder of this is a beautiful bronze plaque and wooden gavel that hangs on the wall of the study in Señor Mazal's apartment. The gavel and plaque were presented to the Sephardic leader in honor of the four terms that he served as President of the B'nai B'rith chapter in Mexico City.⁶⁶

Outside of the Syrian community which was not closely studied, Señor Mazal is the only Jewish leader of the Porfirian immigration now living who raised Jewish children in Mexico, who are today active participants in Jewish community life. Of the other leading Porfirian families, most were childless, like the Grossmans, or bachelors, like Dr. Ulfelder and Jacobo Granat, or married to Mexican women and fathers of

⁶⁶ Interview with Sr. Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1959.

Catholic children, like the Blochs and the Scherers. Rubén Mazal has two children, a son and a daughter, both married to Sephardic Jews. His son, Dr. Ricardo Mazal, operates the family optical business established on Avenida Madero by the senior Mazal in 1917. As illustration of the trend away from complete separation of communities, Dr. Mazal was one of the founders of the new American synagogue where he and his family attend services. His daughter, the granddaughter of Rubén Mazal, was recently married to a young man of Ashkenazic background.⁶⁷

Further evidence of a growing movement to change the structure of Jewish community life is provided by a recently formed organization of young men. The young people call themselves "Neged Hezerem - Against the Stream," and they are militant in their demand that the traditional system of separate communities be ended and one united Jewish community be established in Mexico City. Although the middle-aged leaders react in horror to this "radical plan to change Jewish public life . . . (this) plan that is so extreme and far-reaching,"⁶⁸ the formation of such an organization, indicates that the young people, born and educated in Mexico, share a common culture. Perhaps the Neged Hazerem is with the stream after all.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Chaim Lazdeiski, "Jewish Life in Mexico, 5729," Dayton Jewish Chronicle, September 11, 1969.

CHAPTER VI

ATTITUDES TOWARD JEWS

IN THE LITERATURE AND PRESS OF MEXICO: 1840 TO 1910

Three hundred years of rule by Spain, Europe's most militant Catholic nation, left in Mexico a heritage of hatred and suspicion of the Jew. In popular usage the very term "Jew" was one of opprobrium, associated in the popular mind with evil and the devil; in the mind of intellectual Catholics in Mexico, the equivalent of "Jew" was "heretic." Indeed, Isabella's duty as a Catholic queen, pledged to spread the true faith, influenced her decision to support Columbus' voyage of discovery. Her dedication to maintaining the purity of Roman Catholicism in the newly acquired territories of her domain was illustrated as early as 1501 when she ordered the new governor, Ovando, to bring "no Jews or Moors or newly baptised Christians" to the New World. A decree published in 1523 specifically prohibited not only Jews and newly converted Christians but even children and grandchildren of Jews from entering the colony of New Spain.¹

Prohibition by decree, however, was not enough to prevent the passage of many Judaizers to the New World, and in order to combat the heresy, the Inquisition was introduced

¹ "Royal Instructions to Ovando, 1501," The Spanish Tradition in America, ed. Charles Gibson (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 57. Also, Ernest H. Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York and London: Century Co., 1928), p. 26. Also, Julio Jiménez Rueda, Herejías y supersticiones en la Nueva España: Los heterodoxos en México (México: Imprenta Universitaria, 1946), p. 84.

in America and remained in operation throughout the colonial period. The eighteenth century enlightenment modified its operations but did not end it. Independence brought the final dissolution of the Inquisition apparatus and the establishment of the new Mexican nation as a Catholic Empire. Although the Empire lasted less than two years, until the adoption of the Constitution of 1857, Roman Catholicism remained the established religion of Mexico.

The orthodox Catholic continued to regard the Jew as a heretic, and long years under a liberal constitution guaranteeing freedom of conscience and full protection to non-believers were required before a change in public opinion was sufficient to permit Jews to live openly as Jews in Mexico. The change in attitude became apparent during the latter years of the Presidency of Porfirio Díaz, and by 1910 a Jewish community was openly established in Mexico City.

This chapter will attempt to trace the gradual change in attitude toward the Jew among the intellectual elite of the new nation as revealed in two kinds of publications. First, the change of attitude toward Jewish culture and Jewish history expressed in Mexican books and literary journals from 1849 to 1910 will be examined. Second, the same change in viewpoint as demonstrated in the liberal (and to some extent in the conservative) newspapers in the City of Mexico will be developed. Accepting the anthropological theory first expounded by Robert Redfield that popular culture and tradition develop from and follow "The Great Tradition," the popular myths about Jews will not be discussed in this

chapter. That theme will be included later as part of the explanation for the secrecy surrounding Jewish activity in Mexico and for the very slow development of community life.

Intellectual Mexicans wrote about Jews from the beginnings of independence. However, they were not really interested in the Jews as Jews. A major problem of the Mexicans, from 1821 to the present day, has been to define the Mexican. In the nineteenth century the very concept of "Mexico" divided the new nation as a bitter political issue. For the conservative party, Mexico was the child of Spain, the creation of the colonial power. Since Mexico was seen as an extension of Spain, even though it was now independent, the conservatives believed that to be Mexican meant to be Spanish. This, of course, implied that the nation which would perpetuate Spain in America would adopt the monarchical form of government and would establish Roman Catholicism as the official religion. The liberals, on the other hand, as their ideas became polarized, took the position that Mexico was a newly created organism, the physical manifestation of the ideas of the European Enlightenment. The liberal party of Mexico, just as fanatical as their conservative adversaries, tried to deny their Spanish heritage completely. The liberal goal was a republic modeled after the successful example of the United States with complete freedom of religion and suppression of the powerful Church.

The experience of the French Intervention and the final defeat of Maximilian's Empire in 1867 decided definitely

that monarchy would never be adopted as the form of government in Mexico, but the bitter struggle between liberals and conservatives continued through the years of the Restored Republic and the early Porfiriato. While among intellectual circles change can be detected before the Social Revolution of 1910, not until the Constitution of 1917 did Mexico officially acknowledge herself as the product of three hundred years of the mingling of the Indian and Spanish civilizations.² The long struggle for self-identification was marked by civil war, by dictatorship, and, among the intellectuals, by bitter polemics carried on in the journals of the opposing factions.

The topic of Jews provided the perfect device in the polemical struggle. Neither conservatives nor liberals had any interest in Jews as people or in Jewish culture or in the Jewish religion. Jews, however, served as a weapon in the political battle. As liberal and conservative opinion polarized, the Inquisition came to be the very symbol of medieval Spain, and pointing out the horrors of the Inquisition was a favorite subject of the nineteenth century liberals. What better way to attack the Church and all that it stood for than to emphasize the travesty of justice practiced by the Inquisitorial courts for over three hundred years?

² Edmundo O'Gorman, "Introduction," to Justo Sierra's The Political Evolution of the Mexican People, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. ix-xviii.

To strengthen the image of cruelty and horror, the Mexican liberals came to depict the Jews of New Spain as the innocent victims of a merciless and secret terror. The beautiful and pure Israeli maiden held prisoner in a convent was invented as the ideal image of the helpless victim of a fanatical church. This romantic legend was the basis for the plot of one of the most widely circulated anti-clerical books, the popular novel La hija del Judío by Justo Sierra O'Reilly³ which first appeared in serial form in the review El Fénix in 1849. This work is an example of the liberal Mexican thought that preceded the Revolution of Ayutla, just as the work of the author's son, Justo Sierra, is a model of the positivist philosophy that succeeded the old liberalism.

The elder Sierra began his story with an idyllic description of the warm and happy home where the heroine, Doña María, lived with her noble parents. This ideal picture was shattered by the cruel intervention of the Inquisitorial officials who arrested Doña María's parents for Judaizing and took the beautiful maiden to the home of the Bishop. There Doña María fell in love, but she and her lover were separated when the Bishop sent his charge to a convent. Just in time to save her from the vows that would have bound her for life, her lover found and rescued Doña María and took her far away to live happily ever after.

³ (Mérida, Yucatán: Imprenta del Comercio a Cargo de J. G. Corrales, 1874); Prologo..

When La hija del Judío was first published in book form in 1874, the editor denied that the book had any political connotation at all, and described it simply as a classic Yucatanese novel.⁴ The setting of the novel in Yucatán is significant as this was one of the centers of marrano settlement in New Spain.

In sharp contrast to the romantic novel as an anti-clerical device, the early positivists attacked the Church with empirical demonstrations of the fallacy of all religious teaching. In 1867 President Benito Juárez appointed the positivist Gabino Barreda as Minister of Education, and the new scientific approach soon became evident in the press as well as the schools.

A positivist journal entitled El Libre Pensador was published in 1870, and appeared to be dedicated solely to attacking the Catholic Church and advancing the positivist religion. This short-lived, intellectual journal was unique in Mexico in its profession of religious positivism. One of the principal tenets of the Comtian religion was morality, and El Libre Pensador attacked the clergy with articles which proposed to demonstrate the immorality of the confessional and the hypocrisy of clerical celibacy.⁵ Although Jesus Christ was viewed as a reformer by the editors of the journal,

4 Ibid.

5 El Libre Pensador, Periódico Político, Filosófico, Literario, Organo de la Sociedad de los Pensadores Libres de México (México, 1870), p. 288.

the Catholic Church was held guilty of corrupting the teachings of Jesus for its own immoral ends.⁶

Judaism was treated extensively in a series of articles signed with the pseudonym "Eleutheros." These articles were careful, objective analyses which sought to prove that the teachings of Judaism were based on the historical realities of biblical times but were no longer valid in the modern world. In "La Biblia" a six page article analyzing the political character of the Old Testament, Eleutheros found in the messianic assurances of the prophets the reason for the continued isolation of the Jewish people in a world of informed modern thinkers who reject traditional religion. The article interpreted the continuing faith of the Jew throughout his hopeless political struggle against Rome as the result of the teaching of the prophets. Eleutheros believed that once the Temple had been destroyed and Israel decisively conquered, the prophetic teachings were no longer valid. Now in the nineteenth century, the positivist writer continued, Judaism would soon agree that "all truth is reduced to God: The Messiah is Progress."⁷

"The Religion of the Future" by the same author predicted a religion based on reason and morality and the "sublime code of universal fraternity. . . . It's appearance

⁶ "La vida de Jesús," El Libre Pensador, pp. 246, 331, 347.

⁷ "La Biblia," El Libre Pensador, pp. 225-230.

on the political and social horizon will be the ultimate blow to the divine right of kings and to the threatening institutions of the Middle Ages." A second installment under the same title concluded, "The road to God is Reason."⁸ In the 1870 periodical, Eleutheros used an interpretation of the history of the ancient tribe of Israel to demonstrate the truth of the new religion of Positivism.

While El Libre Pensador was anti-tradition, anti-superstition, and anti-cult, El Precursor, published six years later, was frankly and purely anti-clerical. Where El Libre Pensador had adopted the "scientific" approach of positivism, El Precursor used the device of satire to attack its adversary. The editorial staff of the latter journal included some of the leaders in the anti-clerical, polemical battle in Mexico; Antonio Martínez del Romero, Ignacio Altamirano (who had also written for El Libre Pensador), Ignacio Ramírez, and Justo Sierra all contributed. Many of the biting attacks on the clergy and the conservative press were signed "El Rabbi," a clever way of emphasizing that the editors of this periodical were avowed enemies of the clericals.⁹

The viewpoint of the Mexican positivist toward religion is most clearly expressed in the writings and speeches of Justo Sierra. The thought of this Mexican writer and educator dominated the period of the Restored Republic and the Porfiriato.

⁸ "La religión del porvenir," El Libre Pensador, pp. 287-288, 321.

⁹ El Precursor (Aguascalientes), February 8 and March 15, 1875.

As the Director of the National Preparatory School he headed the institution that made positivism the basis of education for the professional class of Mexico. Justo Sierra would be responsible for the reopening of the National University of Mexico in 1910, and by that date he would renounce positivism for the new liberalism which came to dominate Mexican intellectual thought in the first third of the twentieth century.

In 1875, however, Justo Sierra still spoke as a positivist. On the occasion of the opening of the Congressional session of 1875, the Catholic press praised the President for reminding the new deputies of their "Christian duties." Justo Sierra responded that the term "Christian duties" chosen by the President was "a little archaic, and perhaps, perhaps, a great deal illegal . . . because the social entity 'nation' is not Christian, nor is it Jewish; nobody has baptised it or circumcised it. Therefore it is not true that for the members of the House there cannot exist Christian duties, but only Constitutional duties?" For Justo Sierra, religion and the Constitution were not only separate, they positively were in conflict with each other. "Individuals are responsible for making choices between good and evil, but the conscience of the Mexican nation is the Constitution of 1857," wrote Justo Sierra. "Christianity as a religion has its dogmas; modern society has its own. For example, it is a principle of penal philosophy triumphant today that the son cannot be punished for the sin of the father . . . also that punishment must not be irreversible. How do you conciliate these

principles with original sin, with punishment in limbo, with eternal punishment?" In 1875 Justo Sierra stated his convictions in these words: "The ideal of truth and justice has ascended for the modern world; Christian evolution has already passed; we live in an epoch essentially positivist and scientific."¹⁰ This was truly the positivist age in Mexico; but in less than twenty years, Justo Sierra would announce that this age, too, had passed.

The positivist disdained the metaphysical and the ordained and urged men to revise the laws to fit their circumstances.¹¹ To the positivist, Jews were not dangerous, as were wealthy and politically subversive clergy and their supporters. Cultism of any kind, however, was considered medieval and ignorant by the enlightened purists of the restored republic.

In the political arguments of the day, Jews continued to serve a purpose. Vicente Riva Palacio, in his monumental México a través de los siglos, used Jewish suffering during the Inquisition as one vehicle through which he demonstrated the weakness of colonial Spain. Rather than the novel or the Bible or positivist rhetoric, Riva Palacio adopted history as his medium - history according to the objective rational standards perfected by Gibbon in the eighteenth century. As

¹⁰ Justo Sierra, "Cristianos," El Federalista (México), April 7, 1875, in Obras completas del Maestro Justo Sierra, ed. Augustin Yanez (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1948), IV, 74-75.

¹¹ Justo Sierra, "La Constitución y los Ultramontanos," La Libertad, October 20, 1879 in Obras, IV, 205-208.

Gibbon, to a large degree, related the fall of Rome to the adoption of Christianity as the universal religion of the Empire, so Riva Palacio used the Inquisition as evidence of the single greatest weakness of the Spanish Empire. The institution was the product of an age that operated according to standards determined by faith in accepted authority. Riva Palacio regarded the Inquisition as part of the medieval mind composed of men preoccupied with orthodoxy and heresy because they did not enjoy the benefits of the enlightened knowledge that opened men's minds in the eighteenth century. His history of the Inquisition demonstrated how far Mexico had progressed beyond narrow religious concerns to an open society where every man is protected by constitutional guarantees from "the power of terror."¹²

"Secrecy," wrote Riva Palacio, "was the soul, the source, the powerful nerve of the Inquisition; nothing that happened there had to be known or revealed by anyone, neither inquisitor nor minister, nor family, nor king. . . . Secrecy made defense impossible, and the unfortunate subject walked in the shadows wondering what he was accused of, who were his accusers, who were the witnesses against him, what they would demand of him, and what he was expected to say against himself and against another person; the accuser was protected - his name never known by the accused."¹³

¹² D. Vicente Riva Palacio, El Virreinato, Tomo II of México a través de los siglos (México: Balleasca y Comp., 1885), pp. 401-430, 447-450.

¹³ Ibid., p. 412.

The end of the circumstances that made the "terror" possible came only because of the "progress made in the eighteenth century - a century to which our generation has been ungrateful and unjust, not understanding how much humanity owes, nor confessing that through the eighteenth century arrived the world of the nineteenth - the rapid road which leads to liberty and well-being." The author used the past to teach his readers to appreciate the present. Riva Palacio was a nineteenth century Mexican liberal historian; he denied the heritage of Spain and credited the eighteenth century enlightenment with the making of modern Mexico. He concluded his chapter on the Inquisition with the reminder that "it is always useful to stop and contemplate such somber pictures as that of the Inquisition, since, as Darwin says, 'then we will be able to understand all that we owe to the progress of reason, to science, and to all our accumulated knowledge.'"¹⁴

A modern Mexican attitude toward publicizing the Inquisition is indicated by the reception and reputation of the work of Vicente Riva Palacio. In 1870 he published the Inquisition proceso of the trial of the Carvajal family.¹⁵ The proceedings against some one hundred members of the family present a tragic tale and a powerful attack against the institution. All of the author's work is warmly praised

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 430.

¹⁵ D. Vicente Riva Palacio, El libro rojo (México: Díaz de León, 1870).

in Historia moderna de la República mexicana, the encyclopedic history of the República Restaurada and the Porfiriato edited by Daniel Cosío Villegas. Riva Palacio's novels, as well as his multiple volume history are noted as important, even classic contributions to Mexican letters. However, the publication of the procesos in El libro rojo is not even mentioned.¹⁶

In 1889 Francisco Rivas Puigcerver published Inquisition documents dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth century autos da fé in Spain.¹⁷ The motivation of the Mexican born Jew was completely different from that of his contemporary, Vicente Riva Palacio, but the reception was the same. Absolute silence greeted his listings of names of men and women processed by the Inquisition in Granada in 1721. While Riva Palacio had published Inquisition documents to point out the contrast between medieval Spain and liberal Mexico, Francisco Rivas wanted to memorialize the martyrs who had suffered for their faith and to condemn the cruelties of the Inquisition. The periodical that Rivas published was openly Jewish and frankly ignored by both the liberal and Catholic press of Mexico City.

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¹⁶ Luis González y González, Emma Cosío Villegas, Guadalupe Monroy, Historia moderna de México. La República Restaurada: La vida social, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1956), pp. 754, 756-757, 778-779, 782, 785, 790, 795.

¹⁷ El Sábado Secreto (México), February 9, 1889; La Luz de Sábado, February 23 to April 13, 1889; El Sábado, April 27 to August 1, 1889.

Rivas did publish an article titled "Jews and the New World" in the Boletín of the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics.¹⁸ For publication in the scientific journal, Rivas used the empirical approach in keeping with the acceptable positivist methodology. Through an analysis of the words of the sailors recorded by the interpreter who accompanied Christopher Columbus - words which in English mean "land," "where?" "over there" - Rivas proved that in the discovery party there were Jews and Moslems as well as Christians. Rivas' colleague in the Society and a fellow Jew, Isidoro Epstein, praised Rivas' management of his data and translated the article into German for publication in his periodical.¹⁹

Publishing Inquisition documents in Spanish has never been very popular, even though Riva Palacio did it one hundred years ago and Alfonso Toro republished the same proceso in the 1930's. An Inquisition proceso in English was another matter, and when the first one was published in an American journal in 1896, The Mexican Herald welcomed the article and restated in detail the set of fortuitous circumstances that led to the English publication.²⁰ One day while browsing through some old manuscripts in a Washington, D. C. book shop, Oscar S. Straus, the President of the

¹⁸ Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, Los Judíos y el Nuevo Mundo, Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, II (México, 1891), 202-204.

¹⁹ Germania (Mexico), September 26, 1891.

²⁰ The Mexican Herald, March 23, 1896.

American Jewish Historical Society, came across the original documents of the trial of Jorge de Almeida. There were fifty-five pages of charges, legal rules, and a detailed account of the proceedings written in clear Spanish script. Mr. Straus took the documents (which are now a part of the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society) to Dr. Cyrus Adler, librarian of the Smithsonian Institution and curator of historic religions and archeology at the United States National Museum. Dr. Adler translated and edited the proceso and published an abridged version in the 1896 Publication of the AJHS.²¹ The editors of The Mexican Herald believed that the Inquisition documents were worthy of publication as an indictment of the Spanish past.

The reaction of The Mexican Herald was in keeping with the attitude of the nineteenth century liberals. Every mention of Jewish culture or history, whether in a novel, literary review, history, or daily newspaper, had served a political purpose. The Jewish past was used as a weapon with which to attack Spain, the Conservative Party, and organized religion on the one hand. On the other hand, the Jewish past served as a means to glorify positivism, constitutionalism, and the progress of modern Mexico.

The study of Jewish culture for its own sake was introduced in Mexico in the closing years of the nineteenth

²¹ "The Trial of Jorge de Almeida by the Inquisition in Mexico," ed. Cyrus Adler, Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, IV (Baltimore, 1896), 29-79.

century by the scholar and publicist, Dr. Jesús Díaz de León. The eminent Hebrew scholar served as professor at the National Preparatory School, the School of Higher Studies, and at the National University. He presented Hebrew culture to the educated class of Mexico as an academic subject worthy of study. In a lecture before the School of Jurisprudence at the National University of Mexico, Dr. Díaz de León explained his philosophy and his enthusiasm for teaching not only the Hebrew language, but also an understanding of Hebrew culture. He stressed the necessity of improving relations among the diverse peoples of the world and he proposed that the way to achieve good relationships was through knowledge and understanding.²²

Publications by Díaz de León relating to Hebrew language and culture date from 1891 to 1918. In 1891 he published a line by line translation of the Song of Songs of Solomon from the original Hebrew into Greek, Latin, French, German, and Spanish.²³ In his twenty-three page introduction, Jesús Díaz de León explained his rationale for making the translation and offered an original interpretation of the

²² Jesús Díaz de León, Conference que el doctor Díaz de León dió en la Sala de Actos de la Escuela Preparatoria, 2 agosto, 1911 (Aguascalientes: R. Rodríguez Romo e Hijos). Copy in "Inventario del Fondo," the private archive of Señorita Profesora Rosa de Carreón. Data pertaining to the career, publications, and positions held by Dr. Jesús Díaz de León was made available to the author through the courtesy of Srta. Profesora Carreón.

²³ Jesús Díaz de León, El Cantar de Los Cantares (Aguascalientes: D. Y. Pedroza e Hijos, 1891), 275 pages.

of the meaning of the Song of Songs. A summary of this introduction gives evidence of a new Mexican attitude toward Jewish history and culture. Dr. Díaz de León views the Jews as a historical people with customs and characteristics shaped by history and circumstance rather than by inherited qualities of good or evil.

"Many years ago," wrote Díaz de León, "I read a critique of the Song of Songs with which I could not agree." This critique expressed the traditional Christian interpretation of the Cantar as pure pornography - a lewd poem about prostitution. Díaz de León read the poem in the original Hebrew, and to him it appeared "a conjugal hymn" and "one of the richest flowers of oriental poetry."

Jewish leaders centuries before had evidently prohibited the reading of the Song by people under thirty years of age. The Church fathers interpreted this as proof of the excessively passionate nature of the Jews who had to be protected from dangerous stimulation. Dr. Díaz de León insisted that the prohibition proved nothing at all about passion or lack of it among the Hebrews. Instead, it is evidence of the educational system adopted by the Jewish leaders who tried to "strengthen the spirit with study and meditation of the Law, with the observance of moral principles which fill their books, and with the contemplation of human misery aroused by such readings as the Book of Job."

While denying that the Hebrew people possessed any specific inherited traits, Díaz de León wrote, "What cannot

be doubted is that this people had aptitudes for passing from a state of nature to a state of civilization, from the nomadic life to political organization, from infancy in art to great progress, because in a period of nine centuries it reached the total splendor possible in those days - there is a great distance from Bethel, the monument of brute unformed stone consecrated by Jacob . . . to the sumptuous temple of Jerusalem constructed by King Solomon."

To the author the remarkable contribution of the Hebrews is the detailed record that they left of their civilization. Would a people who left such complete accounts of glories and failures, conquests and captivities, civil codes and sacred liturgies, geneologies from the patriarchs to Jesus Christ, treatises for moral practices, "all in all, everything that the moral and intellectual life of a people can leave consigned to its annals for teaching and study of other generations . . . would they have left out . . . the songs of love, that element of total inspiration, of all progress, and all enthusiasm that fills the intimate life of all societies with joy and enchantment?" The professor wrote lyrically that "Love is the perfume which is exhaled from the literature of all nations and the Hebrew race has the Cantar, that nuptial hymn which reflects the character of the passion in the descendents of Abraham and through which are seen the patriarchal customs."

Another argument advanced by the scholar against the traditional interpretation of the Cantar is the evidence

from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes which stress the excellence of the virtuous woman, and the traditional respect and honor awarded to the strong woman in the Jewish religion. In view of this, the Song of Songs cannot in any way suggest an orgy - it is a hymn of reciprocal passion. If the language seems a little too lively, Díaz de León reminds his readers the poem is the expression of a rather primitive tribe, inspired by nature and filled with similes and metaphors suggested by the land of the ancient Jews.

Jesús Díaz de León regarded the Song of Songs not as a lesson in religion or politics, but as "a jewel of Hebrew poetry. That it is, and nothing more." Judged on this basis, the professor found that "it is beautiful for its simplicity of narration, agreeable for the smoothness of its style, and sublime in its expression of the emotion of the palpitations of the virgin breast languishing for love."²⁴

Jesús Díaz de León also translated from Hebrew into Spanish the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the Professions of Obadiah, the Prophecies of Amos, the Book of Ruth, and the Book of Job. He wrote several books on the Hebrew language including the Importance of the Study of the Hebrew Language from the Linguistic, Literary, Philosophic and Esoteric Point of View, and another titled Hebrew from the Point of View of Style. His most ambitious work was La misión de Israel, "a history of the Jewish people from its origins to our own day." The book is a summary of a series of lectures given by the

²⁴ Jesús Díaz de León, "Introduction," to El Cantar pp. 5-23.

author and was published in Aguascalientes in 1918. Separate chapters discuss biblical history, Hebrew literature, and "the future history of the Hebrew race."²⁵

Díaz de León was far more than a Hebrew scholar. He was active as a scientist and statistician, and he considered himself an educator. For the entire period of the Porfiriato from 1877 to 1910, he published El Instructor, a review dedicated to education.²⁶ Motivated by the conviction that public education is the prime necessity for national progress and prosperity, Dr. Díaz de León introduced a new attitude toward the Jewish past by establishing the language and history of the Jewish people as a legitimate field of study. Unlike his predecessors to whom the Jewish past represented nothing more than a political exercise, Díaz de León's approach was apolitical and purely intellectual.

The significance of Jesús Díaz de León extends beyond his achievements as a Hebrew scholar and educator. The Mexican intellectual's dedication to the culture of a people not his own "because understanding improves relationships between diverse peoples in the modern world" demonstrated a new liberalism, a truly advanced concept aiming at knowledge and appreciation of the heritage of a "people" rather than simply an aggregate of individuals. His thought is an indication that Mexican intellectuals had come to an understanding

²⁵ Rafael Heliodoro Valle, "Judíos en México," Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía, Tomo 81 (Santiago de Chile, 1936), pp. 235-236.

²⁶ El Instructor (Aguascalientes, 1877-1910).

of themselves and no longer needed to be solely preoccupied with denigrating Spain and proving the uniqueness and worth of Mexico. Although the search for Mexican self-identification was by no means finished, Dr. Díaz de León was one Mexican who was able to expand his scope of interest beyond Mexico to a culture distant in time and place. The liberalism of a man willing to study Jews as people with a distinctive culture is completely different from the old individualistic liberalism.

The work of this Hebrew scholar is related to the intellectual acceptance of the Mexican Indian as a historical people whose culture is a significant and integral part of Mexico. The new appreciation of Indian culture differed from early nineteenth century expressions of indianismo which, like the Inquisition, was more of an attack against Spain than a sincere expression of interest in Indian welfare. The liberalism expressed in the Constitution of 1857 denied the centuries old traditions of the Mexican Indian, and made of him an individual equal before the law, while that very law deprived him of his communal institutions. The old liberals sincerely believed that the Ley Lerdo, which made corporate property illegal and thus destroyed the last remaining Indian communal landholdings, would lead to the improvement of the economic and political status of the Indian.²⁷ The opposite

²⁷ Ernest H. Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage, pp. 122-123. Cf. González y González and others, Historia moderna, La República Restaurada: La vida social, p. 335.

happened; the Indian, deprived of the ejido by law, soon lost his land altogether. The reason for this was that the solution was a foreign one, imposed by the example of successful democratic republics where there was neither an Indian communal nor a Spanish corporate heritage.

The liberals of the Reforma, ideologically dedicated to individualism, attempted to solve the problems of Mexico by denying the corporate character of traditional Indian life. Not until group identities were recognized and accepted by the new liberals of the twentieth century could the problems of two thirds of the Mexican population - the peasants - be approached realistically. The Constitution of 1917 legally recognized the corporate nature of Mexican society with special provisions regarding Indian landholdings as well as with an article which treated labor as a separate group. Dr. Jesús Díaz de León, in his study of the Jews as a distinctive cultural group, may be viewed as an ideologic precursor to revolution, significant in his way just as men such as the Flores Magón brothers were important in the political field.

Attitudes may be expressed in either subtle or overt ways. The use of Jewish history and culture for political purposes was a subtle expression of attitude. The nineteenth century Mexican liberals were not the least bit interested in Jews, or in Jewish history, culture, or religion. To the liberal ideologues who wrote novels or history or political or religious essays, Jews were a convenient tool with which to do battle against the conservative clerical party. The

study of Hebrew culture as an academic specialty was a subtle expression of a different attitude. This attitude of respect for a culture deemed worth knowing for its own sake removed the Jewish history from the political to the intellectual arena. The approach introduced by Dr. Díaz de León at the same time changed the Jew himself from a stereotyped fictional character to a human being.

A more obvious demonstration of the same phenomenon - the change from using Jewish history and culture as a tool to attack the political opposition to a genuine interest in the Jews and Jewish religion - can be seen in an examination of the press of Mexico from 1877 to 1910.

In contrast to the indirect indication of attitudes that may be inferred from the varied uses made of Jewish history and culture, the reaction of the Mexican press to actual situations involving living Jewish people presents a clear and overt expression of attitude toward Jews. The newspapers of Mexico were polarized in the liberal-conservative struggle just as the more erudite journals, and here too a gradual change took place. We shall trace the change from the treatment of news of Jews as grounds for polemics, to the matter of fact reporting that characterized the last decade of the Porfiriato.

In order to understand the events reported by the press, it is necessary to know the general historical developments of the period in Europe and the United States as well as in Mexico. The years 1877 to 1910, marked by economic and social change within Mexico, span the thirty-four year

dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. The first years of the dictatorship were devoted to the establishment of internal peace. Law and order was no mean achievement when we recall that until the Porfirian rurales, any road trip was certain to be interrupted by bandits. So routine was the practice that travelers knew exactly where they would be stopped and kept purses ready to hand to the robbers. Once the bandits were controlled and the Yaqui and Maya Indians finally subdued, Porfirio Díaz turned his attention to the development of the country. His científico advisers granted privileges and concessions to foreigners to encourage enterprises in which the científicos always had a share. Foreign businessmen disembarked at Mexico's ports eager to develop the nation and their own bank accounts.

The period in the history of the west that coincided with the Díaz dictatorship was marked by growing nationalism, by territorial and economic imperialism, by the emergence of Russia as a European power, and by the greatest mass migration in human history. The Mexican press reported chiefly the events that were of consequence to Mexico, but in a world which had been made small by nineteenth century advances in communication, there was hardly an important event in Europe or America that did not touch Mexico.

The Mexican papers reprinted news from the European press and from each other. One of the most progressive Mexican newspapers was La Libertad, established by Justo Sierra and others in Mexico City in 1878 as a periodical articulating the positivist philosophy. Its motto was "order and progress,"

and it supported the dogma that faith in science "would lift the veils that surround the mysteries of life."²⁸ The paper was printed by the German press of Jens and Son. Thus it was natural for La Libertad to take particular notice of news events in Germany. A developing anti-semitic movement in Germany prompted an article, one and one half columns long, titled "The Question of the Jews in Germany" at the beginning of 1881. The Mexican periodical reported:

. . . an anti-Jewish or anti-semitic movement has been growing for two years and has assumed threatening proportions. The anti-semitic sentiment comes from the mass of the people and has its roots in popular sentiment, stirred up by some agitators. The parties are not connected with these manifestations and the Prussian government up to this date has remained a neutral spectator to the reaction. Literature being circulated throughout Germany says that the egoism and cosmopolitan character of the Jew is a danger for the national German spirit. . . . The manifesto . . . suggests restrictions such as prohibition of immigration of Jews to Germany, exclusion of Jews from positions of authority, and permission for Jews to teach be restricted to exclusively Jewish schools, and that a new and complete statistical count of Jews in Germany be made. . . .

The article continued by reporting that the Jews of Germany have taken this all silently until recently when the Jewish dominated Municipal Council of Berlin issued a formal protest. The leaders of the anti-semitic movement reacted on election day with a campaign at all polling places featuring the slogan, "Do not elect Jews." La Libertad reported that

²⁸ Justo Sierra, "La Constitución y los Ultramontanos," La Libertad, October 22, 1879.

²⁹ La Libertad, January 1, 1881.

the latest effort to counteract anti-semitism was being led by the Courier de la Bourse, which "from the beginning has opposed this fanaticism which it believed had died with the Middle Ages." The Courier directed an "Appeal to Christians" signed by eighty-four men well known in politics, letters, and the arts. The appeal for tolerance and respect for individual rights caused "a lively sensation in all Germany," according to the Mexican paper. La Libertad editorialized on the widening gulf that was separating those Germans who remained liberals in matters of race and religion and the nationalist group which was growing more intolerant as it became more intensely conscious of being purely German.³⁰

Isidoro Epstein, the German Jewish journalist in Mexico, exemplified the German liberal who deplored anti-semitism while still maintaining a deep loyalty toward his homeland and great pride in German culture. Epstein attacked anti-semitism with the arguments of the positivist. He chose and reprinted in his periodical, Germania, articles which showed that the German government was not anti-semitic. He also sought out and published empirical demonstrations that denied any scientific basis for anti-semitism. In answer to charges of Jewish ritual murder, Epstein translated and published a long article from a Kansas City paper which gave empirical proof that such charges were false. This article quoted Martin Luther, certainly not noted for any love for

³⁰ Ibid.

Jews, who affirmed that there was no basis for accusations of ritual murder. Another authority cited was Ernest Renan, the French devotee of science and expert in religious history. Renan had demonstrated the many prohibitions in the Jewish religion against consuming blood in any form. Murder, of course, was prohibited by the Law of Moses. Renan thus refuted the charge, for to commit murder and to consume blood would be an unforgivable double sin for Jews.³¹

An article on Heine came closer to editorializing than any other by the usually circumspect Epstein. The Empress Elizabeth of Austria had commissioned a statue of Heine as a gift for his native Dusseldorf, but in a wave of anti-semitism, the city refused to erect a statue of a Jew. Epstein deplored the fact that Heine "was robbed of his monument" by irrational and unscientific anti-semitism. The German poet's work was empirical proof that he deserved the honor so senselessly denied him.³² Incidentally, the statue of Heine now stands on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx where it was dedicated by a group of German Americans. This group, which included more Christians than Jews, heard of the scandalous events in Dusseldorf and raised the money to bring the statue to the United States. They had the monument inscribed, "To their great poet, the Germans of America."³³

³¹ "Der Mord Aus Religiosen," Germania, July 11, 1891.

³² Marianne O. de Bopp, "El periodismo alemán en México," Historia Mexicana, IX (April-June, 1960), 569.

³³ Ronald Sanders, The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 12.

The statue was brought to the United States in 1899, but Epstein had died in 1894, unaware of the final resolution of the problem of anti-semitism and Henrich Heine. There is more information about Isidoro Epstein and his unique blend of liberal opinion and scientific method in another chapter. The publication of Germania ceased at his death, and the German periodicals that were founded at the end of the century dropped all connections with the liberal Mexican intellectuals, became "limited, narrow, and exclusive," and increasingly reflected a reactionary and nationalistic German spirit.³⁴

While German anti-semitism in the nineteenth century was limited to printed manifestos, election rhetoric, and rejecting statues, Russia was the scene of violent anti-Jewish riots. On March 13, 1881 Alexander II, Czar of the Russian Empire, was killed by a terrorist bomb. The revolutionists hopefully awaited peasant uprisings against the government. However, Jews, instead of the government, became the victims of riots that broke out in April in the town of Elizabethville. Rioting mobs, incited by government officials, were told that Jewish lives and property enjoyed no protection before the law and that the Czar himself had ordered the attacks which quickly spread to other towns in Russia and Poland.³⁵

With the pogroms began the flight from eastern Europe that was to bring 99,959 Jewish immigrants to the United States

³⁴ Bopp, "El periodismo alemán," p. 570.

³⁵ Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), p. 37.

within a period of eighteen years.³⁶ Within a few days, 4,000 Jews had taken refuge in a small town in Austrian Galicia, and Jewish committees were being formed in France, England, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the United States for the purpose of providing aid for the victims. The reaction of the American Jewish community was, at first, not only apathetic, but unfriendly. There were widespread expressions of alarm in the United States, warning against the problems that the immigration of large numbers of Jews would bring.³⁷

The attitude of some of the leaders of the Jewish communities in the United States is mentioned only to provide a basis of contrast with the reaction to the plight of the Russian Jews expressed in the liberal periodicals of Mexico City. El Siglo XIX printed an article summarizing the distribution of the Jewish population of the earth according to an Italian statistician, Professor Bruniat. Population figures were given for just about every independent nation of the world excepting Mexico and the South American Republics. Perhaps because they did not have to worry about absorbing thousands of eastern European immigrants, El Siglo XIX could afford the admiring tone of the article:

One of the things that most profoundly impresses the thinking man, in contemplating that cosmopolitan race that was so well personified in the Middle Ages by the Wandering Jew, is how he has come to extend himself through all the corners of the earth,

³⁶ Ibid., p. 288.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 40-44.

scattering himself without limit, but preserving the unity of his origin, the sacred fire of his religion, and his customs. We must admire the immense wisdom of the mosaic organization which modelled the brain and spirit of such an exceptional people.³⁸

As thousands of Jews continued to flood the Austrian border towns, the Jewish committees continued to meet and to offer different ideas as to what should be done. Some suggested supporting mass movements of Jews to the United States; others favored settlements in Palestine; still others suggested Canada, Australia, and even Mexico.³⁹

When the headline "Jews in Mexico" appeared in the Paris daily, Le Courrier International in September of 1882, El Siglo XIX immediately translated and reprinted the article. El Monitor Republicano also printed the entire article which described the plight of the Russian Jews and the search by Jewish relief committees for a place where they could send their coreligionists. Until this date the United States had seemed the best place to absorb the displaced Jews, but too many foreigners were pouring into the North American nation, and unoccupied land was becoming scarce.

On the other hand:

Mexico offers to the Jews expelled from Russia a marvelous region, almost virgin, in which a prodigiously fertile earth waits only for ploughing. We must note that in Mexico protection to all creeds is complete and effective; the state is not gran sacerdote, it is atheistic. . . . As for the guarantees and privileges which the Mexican government offers to its

³⁸ "La población israelita del globo," El Siglo XIX (México), September 2, 1882.

³⁹ Wischnitzer, p. 88.

immigrants, they consist of important reductions in price of passage, free concessions of land, transportation - free also - of all tools, machines, and instruments that belong to the colonists. . . . Thus it is commendable that the Jewish committees have advised the Jews of Russia that they should go to Mexico.⁴⁰

La Voz de México, a leading Catholic daily, showed its rejection of the very thought of Jewish immigration with a clever play on words. This voice of the clericals also printed the entire article; the editor changed only the headline to read, "Los Judas en México."⁴¹

The contrasting reactions of the liberal papers, El Siglo XIX and El Monitor Republicano, and the Catholic daily, La Voz de México, demonstrate what news about the European Jews meant to the Mexican press. The interest of the press was not in the plight of the persecuted. The news events supplied a basis for continued polemics between the polarized positions of the liberals and the conservatives. The clerical-conservative position continued to be that Roman Catholicism was the only true religion, and, therefore, the only religion which could be tolerated. The anti-clericals who echoed European positivism in their support of "order and progress," called for complete freedom of conscience and individual liberty in the matter of religion because this was the most effective way to damage the clericals. The liberal-positivist press consistently printed articles about Jews. They were not, however, interested in Jews as people

⁴⁰ El Siglo XIX, September 2, 1882; El Monitor Republicano, September 5, 1882.

⁴¹ La Voz de México, September 5, 1882.

or as representatives of a culture or a religion. They were interested in attacking the medieval Catholic conservatism of La Voz de México, El Tiempo, and El Pájaro Verde.

In the same month that the article appeared in Le Courrier International, La Libertad published an article discussing various plans for colonization of Russian Jews in Palestine. Someone at La Libertad was reading the Anglo-Jewish press, for the source of the news was The Jewish Chronicle, an "Israelite periodical published in London."

The editor of the Mexican paper wrote that "because plans for colonization were so numerous," he felt that it was important to print some of the details. The article, headed "Pueblo de Israel," outlined colonization projects sponsored by three different groups, and concluded "Will the prophecy that the Jewish people will never rebuild Judea be proven false?"⁴²

Just one week later, on September 22, 1882, El Monitor Republicano translated and printed on its front page an article which had first appeared in Le Figaro of Paris. The writer described the rapid assimilation of the modern Jew into all classes of society, and even into high posts of business and government, so that "to be a Jew today is no longer cause of reprobation; it is almost a title of aristocracy." The change, the report noted, had been very rapid, taking place in less than fifty years, and was recognizable in the changing life style of the three living

⁴² "Pueblo de Israel," La Libertad, September 14, 1882.

generations of Jews. The article described the oldest generation which it considered to be almost extinct:

There is the grandfather, the old trader grandfather, or the grandmother, the old Jewish woman who sews her own shroud, who wouldn't eat a bit of bread that didn't come from the consistory ovens at Bordeaux. Good people, of pure Hebraic type, sons of Abraham in whom there is not a touch of materialism; they go to schul with ardor and fast with conviction; in their funerals or weddings they recite with passion their guttural prayers reminiscent of the strange incantations of the Arabs. They have not changed their customs; their ideas have not undergone the least alteration. Born poor, they live modestly, in spite of the fact that fortune has smiled on their sons. . . . These fanatics of Israel still repeat each year, with anguish and with love, 'Next year in Jerusalem.' They still believe in Jerusalem, simple souls!

El Monitor concluded that these traditional orthodox Jews represented a "dying race."⁴³

The attitude of the Mexican paper is in accord with that nation's variety of positivism which looked with pity and sympathy upon the culture of the unenlightened. Behind the sympathetic attitude, however, was the certainty that in time Jews would realize that the teachings of their ancient religion no longer applied in the modern world and then they would accept faith in science and in progress as the true religion.

While the conservative press adopted a policy of ignoring events in eastern Europe, the liberal newspapers continued to report news of Jewish events. La Libertad

⁴³ "Rusos y Judíos," El Monitor Republicano, September 22, 1882.

carried an article signed "A. Naquet" in November 1882, in which the writer graphically described the plight of the Russian Jews.⁴⁴ In February 1883, El Monitor Republicano revealed its continued attention to the Jewish press when it featured an article about the death of the French republican, Gambetta, as it had been reported in four Hebrew periodicals in New York.

The four papers, The Jewish Gazette, The Hebrew Leader, The Hebrew American, and The Jewish Messenger all mourned Gambetta as a fallen Jewish hero, the "saviour of France."⁴⁵

These articles cited here illustrate the response of the Mexican press to the crisis faced by the Jews of eastern Europe in the years 1881 and 1882. The year 1882 was the peak year for immigration to the United States from northern Europe, and the beginning of the rise of immigration from eastern Europe. The movement of 1882 began the greatest population shift of Jews in their entire history.⁴⁶ That the Mexican press should respond to the transatlantic migrations was very natural, because, except for the clericals, the press was positivist in its interest in progress. An integral part of liberal government policy since independence had been and continued to be the encouragement of immigration.

⁴⁴ A. Naquet, "Los Judíos en Rusia," La Libertad, November 22, 1882.

⁴⁵ "Gambetta y los periódicos de Nueva York," El Monitor Republicano, February 10, 1883.

⁴⁶ Wischnitzer, p. 66.

The positivist Díaz government called for immigration as essential for the material development of the country.⁴⁷

By the late 1880's political reaction was rampant in Russia and rumors circulated of terrible legal disabilities to be imposed against the Jews.⁴⁸ At this time a concrete colonization project to settle Jews in Mexico was proposed and reported in the Mexican press. El Financiero Mexicano stated that a plan for an agricultural colony of Jews was being considered by the Mexican government. El Financiero insisted that the question should be decided on the basis of the suitability of Jews for agriculture. Having assured themselves that the Jews would indeed make good farmers, the editor urged the approval of the contract.⁴⁹ The New York Times published the news and described the reaction of the Catholic press as "strongly against the introduction of Jews or Socialists."⁵⁰

El Tiempo, representing the Catholic press, vehemently opposed this project and all Jewish immigration, for the editors believed that only Catholics had the right to live in Mexico. El Tiempo argued that there could legitimately be no freedom of religion in Mexico, for "from the moment in

⁴⁷ "Porfirio Díaz al Congreso de la República de México, September 1877," in Los Presidentes de México antes de la Nación (México: Imprenta del gobierno federal, 1966), II, 24.

⁴⁸ Wischnitzer, p. 67.

⁴⁹ El Financiero Mexicano, February 5, 1887.

⁵⁰ New York Times, February 13, 1887.

which the Roman Catholic religion was first established, it became the only legal religion. Congress does not have to declare a state religion to prohibit other creeds; Congress has only to respect the fact that this is a Catholic country in order to fulfill its duty. . . . Liberty of conscience in a Catholic country is not only an error; it is a completely false deduction; it is a social crime."⁵¹

El Partido Liberal published a front page article summarizing the controversy and ridiculing the opposition for their insistence that only Roman Catholics can properly live in or even pass through Mexico. "If they were to live up to their belief," editorialized the liberal paper, "they would have to surround the country with a wall like that in China, in order to close the roads to everyone who may not be a priest or an editor of a Roman Catholic periodical."

El Partido Liberal voiced the belief of the nineteenth century Mexican liberal that "independence of the spirit is the most precious fruit of nineteenth century civilization," that "tolerance is world wide," and that "only in Mexico do educated men oppose such a basic human right as freedom to worship as one pleases." The article reminded the opposition that the fundamental law of Mexico supported no religion, and agreed with its colleague, El Financiero Mexicano, that the question of Jewish immigration should be discussed

strictly from the point of view of their aptitude for . . . cultivation of the land. Are the Jews suitable for agriculture? Can

⁵¹ El Tiempo (México), April 17, 1889.

they contribute to the development of this industry which must be the salvation of this republic? If they can, let the Jews come. . . . That is the question. And as to whether the Jews have special capacity for the cultivation of the land, their history answers. Besides being hard working, they are honest, constant, and sober. Let them come! Let them come!⁵²

Significantly, neither side bothered to mention that admission of Jewish refugees would be humanitarian. Instead the Jewish question became an issue for a bitter exchange of polemics between the liberal El Partido Liberal and the clerical El Tiempo. The argument over religious freedom reached its peak in 1889 and 1890. El Siglo XIX, El Monitor Republicano, El Partido Liberal, and the liberal organ of the German colony, Germania, all attacked the Catholic press, while the latter insisted that since Catholicism alone professed the truth, it was sinful and criminal to suggest that there is a choice in the matter of religion.

El Siglo XIX seemed to delight in calling the attention of its traditional enemy, La Voz de México, to items concerning Jews. In April 1889, El Siglo printed an unsigned article entitled "Jewish Americans and the Celebration of the Centenary in Washington." The Mexican journalist printed, in full, a long proclamation by Rabbi Jacob Joseph, Chief of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew congregations in the United States. The Chief Rabbi urged all the Jews in the United States to participate in the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of George Washington's inauguration as President;

⁵² "Inmigración judía," El Partido Liberal, February 6, 1887.

he reminded the Jews that they, of all citizens, should have an especially ardent appreciation of the privilege of living as full citizens of this glorious land "where freedom of religion and equality before the law are guaranteed by the Constitution." The Mexican editor italicized this last phrase and continued with the rest of the message. Rabbi Joseph praised the United States and its Constitution which "incorporates the Talmudic principle of recognition of all men as equals before the law" which the Rabbi traced to a passage in Leviticus: "As any citizen within your midst, so will be for you any foreigner who lives with you, and you will love him as yourself." El Siglo XIX italicized the Leviticus quote and then commented:

The Catholic reactionaries of our country should take note of the preceding document. In the United States of the North, the religious sects dedicate themselves to the government, taking part in the general rejoicing of the celebration of a glorious anniversary for a country whose [again italics] constitution guarantees liberty of conscience.

In the United Mexican States the reactionary party celebrates the anniversary of Juárez by throwing more insults on the memory of his illustrious spirit. Love of the stranger is also a sentiment unknown to our reactionaries.

What does our old friend, La Voz de México, say to this?⁵³

The editors of El Siglo XIX soon found another item intended to especially irritate the Catholic press. On

⁵³ "Los Judíos americanos y la celebración," El Siglo XIX, April 30, 1889.

August 2, 1889, the paper reprinted a small news item from Budapest which reported a rather ecumenical attitude expressed by an official of the Roman Catholic Church:

Directing himself to the head of the synagogue in Budapest, Monsignor Galimberti, papal nuncio in Vienna, pronounced these words - which we [the editors of El Siglo] recommend to the intolerants in religion:

'The Catholic Church is not the enemy of you Jews; our religion came out of yours, and both have in common the Bible, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Each positive religion is preferable to atheism which destroys the social order. With this motive all religions must extend themselves to work for accord in peaceful ways.'

"Let La Vox de México take note of these words," advised El Siglo XIX.⁵⁴

The religious controversy was not confined to the liberal-conservative, clerical-anticlerical dichotomy. An argument over how far freedom of religion should extend was carried over into the liberal papers. This argument indicates the conflict between positivism and the new liberal attitude which was developing in Mexico. El Siglo XIX, the most positivist of the papers, believed that a periodical had the obligation to attack superstition and untruth in any religion. El Partido Liberal, seconded by El Monitor Republicano, endorsed a neutral position, indicative of the new liberalism, which was based on the concept that the political journalist, in contrast to the propagandist, "must be as the State which neither supports nor combats any religion. . . . A political daily aspires to be read by

⁵⁴ El Siglo XIX, August 2, 1889.

Catholic, Lutheran, and freethinker. It aspires to be like a Republic whose ports are open for all nations. Tolerance is the virtue par excellence of democracy."⁵⁵

Bitter religious arguments continued throughout 1889 and 1890; after that they gradually diminished in intensity and number. The "uninvolved" position advocated by a few papers in 1889 was standard Mexican journalism by 1900, when religious polemics were notably absent from the Mexican press. It seems that all the liberal publications came to agree that religion should no longer be a field for political debate. The periodicals concentrated their efforts on confronting their antagonists on scientific ground, for "to enter into theological dispute is to concede defeat. . . . One 'I believe' is invincible."⁵⁶

The Catholic daily, El País, was reduced to printing an occasional anti-semitic article, and even here the anti-Jewish element was never openly declared. For example, a man with a recognizably Jewish name was arrested for a petty robbery. El País made of this minor incident a long article featuring in bold type the Jewish name of the accused.⁵⁷ El País naturally looked with displeasure on the news that a Jewish organization was considering a colony of Russian Jews in Mexico, but the Catholic daily could do no more than report the project, implying its disapproval.⁵⁸ There was none of

⁵⁵ El Monitor Republicano, March 1, 1889.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ El País, October 5, 1907.

⁵⁸ El País, January 19, 1909.

the argument of twenty years earlier when the Catholic press had insisted that only Catholics had the right to live in Mexico.

In the liberal press, reporting had become a matter of fact accounting of events. By 1904 The Mexican Herald printed a straightforward article announcing that Jewish New Year services would be held publicly for the first time in Mexico in a room at the Masonic Hall.⁵⁹ In 1905 the journalist who reported the Jewish New Year services expressed interest in "the curious rites that were taking place in the city."⁶⁰ But no paper questioned the right of the Jewish people to be in Mexico and to celebrate their Holy Days in their own "peculiar" fashion.

In the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century and the last decade of the Díaz dictatorship, The Mexican Herald was one of the papers that really counted in the capital. The Herald was regarded as the mouthpiece not only of the American colony, but also of progressive elements in Mexico, enjoying a wide circulation and carrying more news and advertising than any of the Spanish language journals.⁶¹

The Herald's coverage of the Jewish holiday observance was probably the first expression of genuine interest in what

⁵⁹ The Mexican Herald, September 17, 1904.

⁶⁰ The Mexican Herald, September 28 and 30, 1905; October 6, 1905.

⁶¹ Walter F. McCaleb, "The Press of Mexico," HAHR, III (1920), 446.

Judaism was and what Jewish people actually did to ever appear a Mexican paper. And even more significant, the account in The Herald was the only such expression.⁶² It was the custom of the Mexican papers to reprint items of interest noticed in other papers of the city, but no other paper mentioned the Jewish services. Even El Imparcial remained silent, although this paper regularly reported news concerning Jewish developments in Russia and Jewish immigration to the United States.

El Imparcial was the semi-official organ of the Díaz party and the only daily other than The Herald that received the services of the Associated Press or any other international news agency.⁶³ Therefore, it was natural for the other papers to emphasize local news and for those interested to rely on El Imparcial and The Mexican Herald for foreign news coverage.

Examination of the September issues of El Imparcial from 1904 to 1908 showed that no news of Jewish religious observance in Mexico was printed, although several items were published reporting on the situation of Jews in Russia. For example, in September 1904, there was the announcement that plans were being made for greater liberty for Russian Jews.⁶⁴ In 1905 a report appeared that the Jews of St. Petersburg no longer would appeal to foreign committees but would care for their own community.⁶⁵ The following year El Imparcial

⁶² Victor Harris, The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p. 17.

⁶³ McCaleb, p. 444.

⁶⁴ El Imparcial, September 6, 1904.

⁶⁵ Ibid., September 17, 1905.

reported renewed anti-Jewish riots and the murder of eighty Jews in a one week period.⁶⁶

Jews did appear in the local news of Mexico City when they were part of the American colony. El Imparcial reported a banquet given by the colony to honor the United States Secretary of State, Elihu Root, who was making a state visit to Mexico. Among those attending the banquet were several Jewish Americans, including Louis Loubens, Jules Zwicker, Louis Lamb, Jacob Loeb, Louis Loeb, August Doorman, D. Zelinsky, Henry Bloom, Marburg, L. B. Speyer, and W. T. Lampl.⁶⁷ Indeed, by this time it seems that Jews in Mexico were no longer cause for special comment, except that it seemed to some Mexicans that "the City of Mexico is overrun with Jewish merchants."⁶⁸

In 1908, for the first time, El Imparcial published an article which specifically recognized that there was a Jewish community in Mexico City. The article appeared in July during the visit of Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso, Texas to the city. Word had spread that the rabbi was in Mexico City to initiate the building of a synagogue. A front page headline in El Imparcial announced, "Los Judíos Tendrán Una Sinagoga en México."⁶⁹ Rabbi Zielonka had made no statement

⁶⁶ Ibid., September 15, 1906.

⁶⁷ Ibid., October 5, 1907.

⁶⁸ Harvey O'Connor, The Guggenheims: The Making of an American Dynasty (New York: Covici Friede, 1920), p. 94.

⁶⁹ Rabbi Martin Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite (Cincinnati), July 23, 1908.

to the reporter from El Imparcial who had come to his hotel for an interview, and he was quite embarrassed by the whole affair. However, the fact that the semi-official government paper had expressed such interest and recognized in print the existence of a Jewish community in Mexico City indicated the mellowing of religious attitudes in the last years of the Porfiriato.

The new attitude of the Mexican press contrasted sharply with that of the nineteenth century. Religious polemics were almost daily features of the periodicals of the 1880's and early 1890's. By 1910 religious polemics had all but disappeared from the lay journals of the city. The change in attitude expressed toward Jews in Mexico is one indication of the decay of positivism which deprecated all metaphysical belief. The new liberalism emphasized freedom of religion and respect for individual differences. The new liberal spirit of the country must be credited, at least in part, to President Díaz' "politics of conciliation."

Whether by suppressing a newspaper, withholding needed subsidies, making arrests, or forcing a dissident editor to leave the country, Díaz, to all outward appearances, achieved in Catholic Mexico "tolerance of religious creeds and cults."⁷⁰

The economic development of Mexico and the influence in the country of thousands of foreign investors and business agents also played a role in making Mexico a more open country,

⁷⁰ El Universal (México), September 15, 1930.

receptive to people of different customs and different religions. Many of these foreigners were Jews. However, these Jews could not have been in Mexico openly as Jews had their presence been opposed by the powerful dictator and president of thirty-four years. Porfirio Díaz set the policies in Mexico as well as the tone and attitude of the nation. There was Jewish life in Mexico and a more accepting attitude toward Jews in Mexico in 1910 partly because Porfirio Díaz viewed Jewish immigration with favor.

President Díaz remained a positivist until his last day in office. "Order and progress" was his motto, and long after the intellectual leadership of the nation had disavowed positivism for a new social liberalism, the old president continued to articulate the positivist arguments for immigration. Throughout his thirty-four year rule, Díaz favored foreigners with privileges and concessions because he believed that their presence and their money were essential for the development of Mexico. His attitude toward a specific Jewish immigration was expressed in a series of interviews with John W. DeKay, the President of an American company based in Mexico and a frequent writer on Mexican affairs.

Porfirio Díaz, articulating the elitist theory of nineteenth century positivism, told DeKay that his personal reason for encouraging Jewish immigration was that he believed the Jews could serve as "models of industry and thrift" for the people of Mexico. "I would like them to come poor and become rich so the Mexicans would see how it is done," said Díaz, voicing a faith in empirical demonstration as education

reminiscent of the remark made by Benito Juárez some forty years earlier to the effect that if the Indians converted to Protestantism, they would all learn to read. Díaz believed that a large Jewish immigration would teach the Mexican people

to work, induce them to save, and animate them to be more sober and to provide for the time when they can no longer work. It would please me to see great establishments of Jews all through Mexico, and I would extend to them as fully as possible, and not for any political reason, except as an example that in this aspect would serve to benefit the entire country.⁷¹

President Díaz believed that Jewish immigration would be good for his country. In spite of this unsound, elitist, and racist reasoning which denigrated his own countrymen, the approval of the President probably helped to create an atmosphere of acceptance for Jews, at least in the commercial and large population centers of Mexico.

This chapter has attempted to trace the change in the attitude of the literate population of the Mexican nation toward the Jewish people. From the achievement of independence until almost the end of the nineteenth century, anti-clericalism was a major political issue to the Mexican liberals, and "Jews" were a favorite device with which they attacked the Church. The liberals were not the least bit interested in Jews as people, or in Jewish history, culture, or religion. Jews

⁷¹ The Jewish Chronicle (London), January 15, 1909, p. 16. The Díaz statement is also quoted by Moisés González Navarro, La colonización en México: 1877-1910 (México: El Colegio de México, 1960), p. 32.

were merely a convenient tool with which to do battle with the conservative pro-clerical party.

Until about 1870 the Inquisition was the chosen vehicle for the indictment of Spain and its Church. After that date, the colonial institution still had its place, but the Jew offered other means for attack on the conservatives. Ironic articles in the violently anti-clerical periodicals attacked religious superstition and the ignorance of the clergy using terms such as "The Rabbi" and Old Testament themes. Positivist denigration of all metaphysical belief was demonstrated in articles suggesting that enlightened Jews would adopt reason and science as the true religion. When massive emigration from eastern Europe began in the 1880's, news of the Russian persecutions provided another weapon for the continuing polemics. The successful adjustment of Jews in the United States, who proved to be loyal and productive citizens of that country, provided a telling argument against a church that still opposed religious tolerance.

The attitude toward Jews, demonstrated in Mexican literature and in the Mexican press, began to change in the last decade of the nineteenth century when genuine interest in Jewish history and the Jewish religion was first expressed. The change was gradual, and it was introduced in academic circles by Dr. Jesús Díaz de León in 1891. This date coincides with the weakening of the positivist philosophy as the dominant thought among Mexican intellectuals.

Edmundo O'Gorman dates the crisis in positivism to 1881, and its demise to the 1890's.⁷² Justo Sierra, one of the most articulate early advocates of positivism had announced in 1875, "the age of Christian evolution has passed" and "we live in an age of positivism."⁷³ By 1893 Sierra admitted that positivism had produced progress, but had not succeeded in bringing happiness, and in 1895 he announced that "Positivism, like the Christian spiritualism that preceded it, was a school of the past." Sierra no longer believed that positivism could provide the answers to all the nation's problems, but he did not deny its value. He suggested that spiritualism and positivism had each left an important legacy to the nation. Spiritualism had left "to humanity the inextinguishable lamp which is hope, while positivism had provided its method."⁷⁴

The combination of spiritualism and empirical method provided the basis for a new liberalism that would encourage freedom of thought and, consequently, a more open society accepting differences within the social body.

The philosophical change described by Justo Sierra was first applied to Jews in the work of the aforementioned Díaz de León, the scholar who studied Jewish culture because

⁷² Edmundo O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra y los orígenes de la Universidad de México 1910," in Seis estudios de tema mexicano (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), pp. 182-183.

⁷³ Justo Sierra, "Cristianos," in Obras Completas, IV, 75.

⁷⁴ O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra," p. 196.

he believed there was value in such knowledge. By 1904 the change in attitude extended to the most progressive newspaper in Mexico City. The Mexican Herald printed the first published account in any Mexican newspaper of organized Jewish activity in Mexico. This article was actually the first public acknowledgement that any kind of Jewish community existed in the nation. The paper's coverage of religious services in 1904 and 1905 revealed a genuine interest in what Jewish people do in observance of their religion. The Herald, however, was an English language paper, and, therefore, the change in attitude as expressed in El Imparcial was even more significant.

When El Imparcial, the newspaper reputed to speak for the Díaz government, recognized the Jewish community of Mexico City with a front page headline and long article about plans to build a synagogue, this was convincing evidence of the new Mexican liberalism and the more open Mexican society of 1908.

CHAPTER VII

MEXICO - ANOTHER PROMISED LAND?¹

A REVIEW OF PROJECTS FOR JEWISH COLONIZATION

IN MEXICO: 1881 TO 1925

The history of the Jews in independent Mexico as presented in these pages had emphasized the theme of successful adaptation and continuous progress in a country where the Spanish Inquisition of colonial New Spain gave way to the liberal policies of the Mexican Republic. From 1856, the date of the first of the laws of the Reforma, the government of Mexico pursued a policy of encouragement of productive immigration without regard to race or creed. As the preceding chapter has demonstrated, change in social attitudes toward Jews followed gradually the legal recognition and acceptance of different religions in Mexico. The emphasis of this study upon liberalism in Mexico and upon the Jewish people who came to Mexico and successfully established their homes and their institutions has resulted in an image only partially true. The object of this chapter is to restore perspective to this rather one-sided presentation.

The fact must be recognized that in spite of the immigration of individual Jewish people, the total number of Jewish immigrants to Mexico between 1880 and 1910 was but a

¹ The heading of this chapter was used without the question mark as the title of an article by Anita Brenner in Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), 330-341.

minute fraction of the more than two million Jews who emigrated from Europe to the American continents during that same period.² It should also be noted that between 1920 and 1930, when some eight to nine thousand Jewish people from eastern Europe did migrate to Mexico, the rate of immigration of Jews to the United States remained higher than ten thousand each year, in spite of the restrictive Johnson Act of 1924.³

The paucity of Jewish immigration into Mexico cannot be explained by saying that the Jews were not aware of Mexico. During the long presidency of Porfirio Díaz, in the 1920's, and even in the 1930's when Jews began to leave an increasingly hostile Germany, Jewish agencies and individuals proposed and discussed various projects for colonization in Mexico. Until 1927, when the Soviet Union curtailed emigration, the colonization projects were all related to events in Russia. Pogroms, residence and occupation restrictions, and expulsion edicts drove more than two million Jews from Russia between 1881 and 1914. Undoubtedly more would have left had there been a place for them to go.⁴

Mexico was one country that was mentioned regularly, and just as regularly vetoed as a haven for Russian Jews.

² Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948), "Statistical Tables," pp. 288-293.

³ Ibid., p. 289.

⁴ Ibid. Wischnitzer explains the relationship between events in Russia and Jewish emigration, and also demonstrates the limits on the numbers that Jewish relief committees in Germany and the United States could handle, forcing many to return to Russia. See especially pp. 37-39, 66-72, 100-112.

This chapter will examine the various colonization proposals chronologically, and will attempt to explain why not one of them ever materialized. Before proceeding, however, an explanation of the term "colonization" as it was used in Mexico will be offered, as well as a clarification of the policy of the Mexican government in regard to colonization.

For many years the Mexican government used the terms "colonization" and "immigration" interchangeably. In 1905 the terms were distinguished for the first time when José Covarrubias, an engineer and consultant to the Díaz government, defined the two words as separate concepts. "A colony," wrote Covarrubias, "refers to a group of people who come to a country by contract with the government or with a private company which has special authorization from the government to establish colonies. . . . (Colonists) abandon their former country in order to establish themselves in another place, conserving the sovereignty of their origin." The author defined a colonist as one "who comes to cultivate uncultivated land by his own labor and that of his family," in contrast to the immigrant who "comes independently and voluntarily to offer his services in return for a salary."⁵ Separate laws passed in 1909 distinguished colonization from immigration according to the definitions developed by Covarrubias.

⁵ José Covarrubias, "Algunas observaciones de la inmigración y de la colonización en las naciones independientes de América," Boletín de la Secretaría de Fomento (México), November 1906, p. 12.

From the first days of Mexican independence, liberal spokesmen had urged European immigration as the key to economic and political strength, and they urged religious toleration as one means of encouraging immigration.⁶ As the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, and with hopes of finding a liberal regime and economic opportunity in Mexico, immigration of Jews and non-Jews increased in the decade of the 1850's.⁷

The French intervention, however, and the ensuing Civil War virtually stopped immigration from Europe, in spite of Emperor Maximilian's efforts to encourage foreigners to come to Mexico.⁸ The intervention years also disrupted a Jewish community that had been developing in Mexico City.⁹ The restoration of the Republic in 1867 brought with it renewed attempts to increase immigration, and optimistic predictions of the resulting benefits that Mexico would enjoy as old and new blood mixed to increase the vigor of Mexico. The Mexican leaders were not advocating isolated foreign colonies. These men were positivists who held the elitist belief in the inequality of human races. They wanted European immigrants

⁶ Charles A. Hale, Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 179.

⁷ Cartas de Naturalización in the Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores of the Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana.

⁸ Luis González y González, Emma Cosío Villegas, y Guadalupe Monroy, Historia moderna de México: La República Restaurada, La vida social, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1956), p. 138.

⁹ Jewish Chronicle (London), November 21, 1862.

who would become assimilated with the Mexican people, and whose blood, they believed, would strengthen the Mexicans. "Had emigration killed Spain? Immigration would have saved her!" wrote Justo Sierra, articulating the government position. To Sierra and his fellow believers, the power of England, France, and Germany was proof that superior strength was the inevitable result of immigration and miscegenation.¹⁰

For decades the liberals had blamed the small immigration to Mexico on religious intolerance, constant civil wars, abuses by the authorities, and the fact that so much of the property of the country was owned or held in mortgage by the Church. Although these obstacles had been largely removed by the laws of the Reforma, the Constitution of 1857 and the establishment of a liberal political regime, Mexico waited in vain for her immigrants. As a matter of fact, during the years of the Restored Republic (1867-1876) fewer than three thousand immigrants arrived in Mexico annually - a smaller figure than the number of Mexicans who emigrated each year.¹¹ As for Jews in Mexico, in contrast to the "one hundred Israelites" reported in 1862, by 1879 there were only about twenty Jewish families in Mexico City.¹²

Determined to reverse the flow of population and to sizably increase the population of Mexico the Díaz regime

¹⁰ Justo Sierra in El Federalista, November 21, 1874, reprinted in Periodismo Político, ed. Agustín Yanez (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1948), pp. 293-295.

¹¹ González y González, Cosío Villegas, y Monroy, p. 143.

¹² Jewish Chronicle, March 14, 1862, and Der Israelite (Frankfurt), December 10, 1879.

inaugurated practical policies that hopefully would realize the optimistic predictions of the Restored Republic. Porfirio Díaz, who would lead the Mexican nation for thirty-four years, announced the goal of large-scale colonization in his first address to Congress in 1877, and reaffirmed his policy repeatedly.¹³ The practical measures that were designed to make the colonization policy a success were characteristic of the Díaz regime which consistently favored the foreigner with privileges and benefits that were denied to Mexicans.¹⁴

The advantages offered to the foreigner by the Mexican government were well publicized in Europe and not lost on the committees of Jewish philanthropists in London and Paris. Pogroms in Russia in April of 1881 were the catalyst for the beginning of the mass emigration of the Jews from eastern Europe. The coincident circumstances of a Mexican nation in search of immigrants and thousands of desperate Russians in search of homes and a means of livelihood seemed a most propitious combination, and Jewish committees in the western countries hopefully looked to Mexico as a potential haven for the refugees.¹⁵

In September 1882 two liberal newspapers in Mexico City, El Siglo XIX and El Monitor Republicano, reprinted an

¹³"El Presidente Díaz al Congreso, 4 abril de 1877," Los Presidentes antes de la Nación, Vol. II, Informes de 1876 a 1911 (México: Imprenta del Gobierno Federal, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁴ Manuel González Ramírez, Las instituciones sociales: El problema económico, Vol. II of La Revolución Social de México (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), p. 379.

¹⁵ Wischnitzer, pp. 88 and 92.

article from a Paris journal concerning a proposal for establishing a colony of Russian Jews in Mexico. The article stressed the advantages offered by Mexico to prospective immigrants. Free grants of uncultivated government owned lands, reduced steamship fares, free railroad transportation within Mexico, free transport of tools, machinery, and animals were some of the inducements to colonists who would cultivate the "rich but undeveloped" Mexican lands.¹⁶

This same month, September of 1882, a German Jew named Guillermo Müller, who had emigrated to Mexico some years earlier, proposed to buy a tract of land near Jalapa for the site of a colony of one hundred Jewish families.¹⁷ The suggestion that Jewish emigration be directed to Mexico came also from Austria where thousands of Jewish refugees crowded into the towns across from the Russian border. This suggestion was in the form of a letter from the Chief Rabbi of Austria to the editors of the Jewish Chronicle of London.¹⁸ After the announcements of these three proposals in September 1882, there was no further word of Jewish colonization in Mexico for several years.

In spite of the generous concessions granted by the Mexican government to encourage immigration and in spite of the support of the leading newspapers, no Jewish colony was

¹⁶ El Siglo XIX, September 2, 1882 and El Monitor Republicano, September 5, 1882.

¹⁷ La Voz de México, September 5, 1882.

¹⁸ Jacob Beller, Jews in Latin America (New York: Jonathan David Company, 1969), p. 20.

established in Mexico. The United States was able to absorb the 25,619 Russian Jews who arrived in that country in 1881 and 1882, and the next year the emigration dropped considerably.¹⁹ A few cases of typhus caused the temporary closing of the port of New York, and at the same time an edict by the Czar eased the emergency in Russia for a few years.²⁰ However, the failure of all the later colonization proposals for Mexico suggests that factors other than these temporary conditions inhibited colonization in Mexico.

It seems that Jewish leaders were wary of deliberately sending Jews to a deeply Catholic country where a liberal newspaper would half playfully warn its Jewish readers "to abstain from showing their noses" on the morning of the Saturday of Glory, for "a disaster could happen to them" on this festive day "when Judas would be burned in effigy."²¹ This fear of a Catholic country may not have been entirely groundless. The reaction of the leading Catholic daily to the proposal of Jewish colonization suggests that not all of Mexico was as liberal as the laws would indicate. La Voz de México also published the article about the proposed Jewish colony, changing the title, however, from "Los Judíos en México" to "Los Judas en México."²² The liberal papers, by

¹⁹ Wischnitzer, p. 66.

²⁰ Samuel Joseph, A History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1935), p. 40.

²¹ El Monitor Republicano, April 20, 1889.

²² La Voz de México, September 5, 1882.

their choice of articles, seemed to acknowledge the deep superstition and hatred that pervaded the interior of the nation.

A few weeks after the colonization article was published, El Monitor Republicano translated another article from Paris entitled "Russians and Jews." This story opened with an account of the barbarous conditions in Russia where "a wind of madness blows through the black pines . . ." The writer then admonished his readers:

The barbarism of the Russians, chasing Jews from the borders of Galicia, should not make Frenchmen proud. . . . I know departments of France where even today the Jew is a true pariah, and in these departments, anyone who passes as a Jew is persecuted! . . . One must not judge the entire world by what happens in Paris! There in the countryside, hatred runs strong against these lepers."²³

The warning that "one must not judge the world by what happens in Paris" was transferred by implication to Mexico, where the contrast between the cosmopolitan city and the primitive countryside may have been more marked than in France.

In Mexico the scattered Jewish immigrants who penetrated into the interior of the country either as itinerant peddlers or as agents of foreign businesses, instinctively kept silent about their religion. Unlike the Jewish settler in southwestern United States who carried on his business over the Mexican border, but lived openly as a Jew in Texas or New Mexico, the Jew who made his home in Mexico kept his religion

²³ El Monitor Republicano, September 22, 1882.

a strictly private affair.²⁴ One American Jewish periodical asked rhetorically, "How long will it be before Jewish worship crosses the border from San Antonio?"²⁵

As far as the Mexican government was concerned, religious belief was completely irrelevant to the important issues of Mexican life. The aim of the government was to develop and increase the wealth of the Mexican nation. To this end the Mexican Congress passed the Law of December 15, 1883 which was designed to encourage colonization projects by companies or individuals, and also to induce a stream of spontaneous immigration. The law increased the President's dictatorial powers by placing him in charge of all the government owned uncultivated lands - terrenos baldíos - and granted him the authority to name engineers and companies to survey the land. The President had the authority to cede to the surveyor up to one third of the land in payment.²⁶

Individuals as well as companies could reap the benefits of the generous Mexican laws. Free title to all

²⁴ Letter from William Mayer to Rabbi Martin Zielonka dated December 22, 1936 in "Zielonka, Sermons, Lectures, and News Clippings," AJA. The Mayer letter which summarizes the experience of a Jewish family in Mexico from the last decade of the Porfiriato to 1936 is printed in full as the Appendix to this study, 306.

²⁵ Die Deborah, II (Cincinnati, December 1865), 100.

²⁶ "Ley de 15 de diciembre de 1883," in Código de colonización y terrenos baldíos de la Republica mexicana: Años de 1451-1892, ed. Francisco F. de la Maza (México: Secretaría de Fomento, 1893), pp. 936-945.

lands would be granted for the price of ten years paid taxes. Colonists would receive bonus land provided that they cultivated one tenth of it, and the exemptions previously mentioned added to the inducements offered by the Law of 1883.²⁷ These benefits were offered because Mexico's population was simply too small and too scattered to effectively develop the land. A population of about ten million people in a territory of 1,800,000 square kilometers meant a population density of less than six per square kilometer.²⁸ To the Mexican government, the problem of economic development seemed insoluble without extensive immigration.

In spite of the liberal laws and extensive privileges, the policy was a failure.²⁹ After 1900 the government would begin a policy of self questioning and reconsideration of the favoritism shown to foreigners, but from 1883 to 1900 the policy described was pursued enthusiastically by the Díaz government.³⁰ The peak years of the Mexican effort to attract foreigners coincided with further crises in Russia and with serious discussions of Jewish colonization in Mexico.

²⁷ Roland Bonaparte, "Population et Colonization," in Le Mexique au debut de XX siecle, (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1904), II, 122.

²⁸ M. Hippolyte Gomot, "Agriculture," in Le Mexique, I, 213.

²⁹ Moisés González Navarro, La colonización de México: 1877-1910 (México: El Colegio de México, 1960), p. 75.

³⁰ González Navarro, La colonización details government immigration policy, colonization efforts, and the usually disappointing results. See also Roberto Gayol, "La colonización y el desarrollo de la irrigación," Boletín de la Secretaría de Fomento: 1903-1904 (México, 1904), pp. 141-183.

In 1887, as Russian emigrants waited in the port cities of northern Europe, a group of Jewish men who lived in Mexico began negotiating for a project to bring five thousand Russian Jews to Mexico for settlement in agricultural colonies. The sponsor of the project was Lionel Samuel, a member of a prominent London Jewish family who lived in Mexico for about thirty years.³¹ Mr. Samuel's plan as well as his wide contacts with British and American bankers and clergymen were fully discussed in the Mexico City newspapers, El Financiero Mexicano and El Partido Liberal. Both papers endorsed the project, providing that the colonists "would be suitable for agriculture" and "assure the successful development" of Mexican uncultivated land. The press insisted that the project should be judged strictly on an economic basis. "Would Jewish colonization increase the wealth of the Mexican nation? If so, then let them come," editorialized El Partido Liberal, with the full agreement of the positivist El Financiero.³² Just as in 1882 when the first Jewish colonization project was suggested, the Catholic press voiced its opposition on the grounds that Mexico was a Catholic country and therefore only those who professed the Roman Catholic religion could legitimately live in Mexico.³³

³¹ New York Times, February 13, 1887. Also Victor Harris, The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p, 15.

³² El Financiero Mexicano, February 5, 1887 and El Partido Liberal, February 7, 1887.

³³ La Voz de México, February 6, 1887.

The adamant objections of the Catholic press did not halt the plans for a large-scale Jewish immigration. The project continued beyond the stages of preliminary discussion to serious negotiations with President Díaz. The Mexican government announced that it would welcome five thousand Jewish immigrants and would assist with the immigration. Mr. Isaac Samuel of London confirmed this report, as did Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston. Lionel Samuel in Mexico assured his father that he was willing to take on the work of managing the project.³⁴

By the summer of 1891 Jews in New York and Paris were also involved in serious consideration of the large-scale colonization project in Mexico, largely as a result of heightened political reaction in Russia. Anti-semitic outbreaks in the czarist state had reached a new peak in March of 1891 when "20,000 Jews, most of them workmen" were ordered to leave Moscow. At the same time a violent pogrom brought bloodshed and destruction to the poorest Jewish section of the city. Expulsions of artisans in other Russian cities followed, and in numbers about twice as large as ever before, Jews jammed the Russian railroad stations and Dutch and German ports.³⁵ The results of these events are evident in the immigration statistics of the United States. While in 1890, 67,450 Jewish

³⁴ Der Israelite (Frankfort), August 27, 1891.

³⁵ Wischnitzer, pp. 67-69.

immigrants entered this country, in 1891 the figure rose to 111,284, and in 1892, to 136,742.³⁶

Baron Maurice de Hirsch, one of the world's foremost Jewish philanthropists, dedicated his efforts and his fortune to alleviating the plight of his unfortunate coreligionists in Russia. Hirsch proposed to direct emigration from Russia to suitable places in the western hemisphere, and to this end he founded the Baron de Hirsch Fund of New York and the Jewish Colonization Association (commonly known as the ICA) of Paris. The work of the two agencies would be to select emigrants, transport them, and place them in industry, handicrafts, and particularly in agricultural settlements.³⁷

Land for agricultural settlements was purchased by the ICA in several countries including the United States, Canada, and Brazil, but chiefly in Argentina which Hirsch believed would be a suitable haven for Jews because of the country's sparse population and freedom from racial and religious prejudice. An added incentive in 1891 was the low price of land due to an economic depression.³⁸

Perhaps Mexico, too, possessed the very features which Baron Hirsch found attractive in Argentina. In June 1891 Jacob Schiff, a banker with extensive interests in the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

³⁷ New York Times, September 11, 1891. Also Wischnitzer, p. 79.

³⁸ Morton D. Winsburg, Colonia Baron Hirsch: A Jewish Agricultural Colony in Argentina, No. 19, University of Florida Monographs in the Social Sciences (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963), pp. 4-5.

Mexican railways and one of the leading Jewish philanthropists of New York, wrote to Ernest Cassel in Mexico regarding the possibility of directing the emigration of Russian Jews to Mexico. Cassel, a close personal friend of Jacob Schiff, was a prominent British financier and railroad magnate involved in the construction of Mexican Central Railroad. He was also one of the seven men associated with Baron Hirsch as a shareholder in the ICA. As a man who knew Mexico well, this mutual friend of the American and European philanthropists was called upon to evaluate Mexico as a site for agricultural colonies. Schiff's letter to Ernest Cassel indicates that the American had been exposed to optimistic reports of Mexico's advantages. He wrote of

large and fertile areas in healthful districts in Mexico which can be bought at nominal prices. We are told that the Mexican government would in every way facilitate and support immigration on the part of Jews, and we are told that there are no more tolerant people than the Mexican which is completely unprejudiced toward all religions.

Since you know Mexico so much better than I, your opinion ought to carry more weight with Baron Hirsch. . . . That great areas of land are available in Mexico there can be no doubt, and if you are of the opinion that steps ought to be taken to direct Russian immigration to that country, perhaps you would discuss the question with Baron Hirsch.

Mexico is in any case nearer than the La Plata states, and the expenses of transportation would be much less, and what is not to be minimized, the colonies to be founded there could be much more easily supervised and guided than in South America. . . .³⁹

³⁹ Letter from Jacob Schiff to Ernest Cassel dated June 9, 1891, in "Jacob H. Schiff, Papers," AJA, Microfilm roll #714.

Ernest Cassel evidently carried Jacob Schiff's message to Baron Hirsch, for in September, as the New York philanthropist had earlier, Baron Hirsch asked Cassel's opinion as to whether Mexico would be a suitable and economically advantageous country to which to direct a large-scale immigration of Russian Jews. The letter written by Baron Hirsch indicates that the sound prospect of the economic success of the proposed colonies was of paramount importance. The failure of so many of the agricultural colonies established in Mexico during the Díaz regime confirms the legitimacy of Baron Hirsch's concern. He wrote:

I must admit that the proportions which the emigration of Russian Jews has assumed, and the excessive immigration which begins to make itself felt in the United States, makes it incumbent upon us to look around for new outlets for the colonists. But then, these new outlets must be of a sort to offer indisputable material advantages and a certain certainty of success.

Baron Hirsch insisted that the decision to colonize in Mexico would depend upon assurances that the capital invested

will receive a sufficient and certain remuneration, for, only under these circumstances will it be possible to raise the enormous capital needed for such a gigantic enterprise.⁴⁰

Obviously the European philanthropist was not thinking in terms of a small-scale charity project, or even of an experimental colony. The "gigantic enterprise" envisaged

⁴⁰ Letter from Baron Maurice de Hirsch to Ernest Cassel dated September 16, 1891, quoted by Samuel Joseph in A History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, p. 40.

by Baron Hirsch was no less than the eventual removal and settlement of every Russian Jew. He wrote:

No doubt if it were only a question of transporting a limited number of colonists, the moneys needed would be found a fond perdu; but having to face eventually a colonization scheme which may embrace a population of five million souls (distributed, I must admit, over a great number of years), we must take care so that capital which is in good faith invested (will receive a fair return). . . .⁴¹

Baron Hirsch also insisted firmly "that the management of the Mexican colonization will be entirely in American hands," while the European role would consist only in contributing financially and in the selection and transporting of the immigrants.⁴²

After this indirect contact through Ernest Cassel, Baron Hirsch and Jacob Schiff corresponded directly during the last months of 1891. Their letters reveal an interest tempered by caution. In a letter dated October 15, 1891, Schiff suggested that certain parts of Mexico, "more especially the plateaus offer settlers every opportunity which can be expected anywhere from prudent management and diligent work." Schiff was encouraged by the decision of the Mormon agricultural community to colonize in Mexico and felt that their favorable decision provided "a strong argument for the possibilities which that country must offer this settler."⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cyrus Adler, Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), II, 91.

Jacob Schiff had been informed that the Mexican government "was prepared to make important concessions to a bona fide Russian immigration." The Mexican government's endorsement of the project was confirmed in an official letter which the agent of the Hirsch Fund translated and mailed to Jacob Schiff.⁴⁴ Schiff suggested that an "intelligent and reliable agent be sent to Mexico to deal directly with the government . . . and to investigate in person the exact areas in Mexico where immigrants could be settled to the best advantage."⁴⁵

Schiff agreed with Hirsch on the desirability of undertaking any such project on a businesslike basis, but he emphasized that this approach was now impossible in New York where ten thousand immigrants were arriving each month, straining the physical resources of the city, and the financial and personnel resources of the Jewish community. Involved as he was with the problems of the massive immigration to New York, as well as his other business and philanthropic activities, Schiff did manage to select two men whom he believed were suitable to carry out the Mexican investigation. On November 9 he wrote to inform Baron Hirsch that he had selected two investigators and was willing to send them to Mexico at his own expense. However, he also informed Baron

⁴⁴ Letter from Jacob Schiff to Honorable A. S. Solomons dated July 20, 1891 in which Schiff thanks Solomons for the copy of the letter in which the Mexican government offered valuable inducements to Russian immigrants. In "Jacob H. Schiff, Papers," AJA, Microfilm roll #714.

⁴⁵ Adler, II, 91-92.

Hirsch that due to the demands on his time imposed by the excessive immigration to New York, he would not be able to accept the responsibility of supervising the immigration of Jews into Mexico.⁴⁶

Early in 1892 Jacob Schiff wrote to Baron Hirsch the letter which concluded the discussion of the Mexican project. Schiff suggested that colonization in Mexico was not practicable. He had "just received information on wages and labor conditions which do not seem very satisfactory. All wages are very low and the competition for skilled labor in the lower strata of the population is rather keen. This rather speaks against Mexico. . . ."⁴⁷ Thus, by the beginning of 1892, both the Hirsch and the Samuels projects for colonization in Mexico were abandoned. The low wage scale prevailing in Mexico may well have been sufficient reason for vetoing the project. Low wages were again noted as the greatest obstacle to Jewish immigration to Mexico in 1905, when Victor Harris wrote that "There is no Jewish proletariat in Mexico."⁴⁸ In 1925 the situation seemed no better when Dr. Maurice B. Hexter recommended that Russian Jews avoid Mexico "because of the low wages there."⁴⁹ Even Porfirio Díaz said in 1909 that

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁷ Letter from Jacob Schiff to Baron Maurice de Hirsch dated January 8, 1892, in "Jacob Schiff Papers," AJA, Microfilm Roll #715. This letter is cited in part in Adler, II, 93.

⁴⁸ Harris, p. 34.

⁴⁹ "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (1926), 281.

"the unskilled Jewish workman would be better off in the United States."⁵⁰

Recent research by Mexican economic historians supports the conclusions reached by the less scientific observers quoted here. According to an analysis by the Mexican economist, Fernando Rosenzweig, the real wage in Mexico actually decreased between 1877 and 1911. The average daily wage, computed at 1900 prices, fell from 32 centavos in 1877 to 30 centavos in 1911.⁵¹ However, the wage level did not remain stationary during the thirty-four year Porfiriato, as the figures at the beginning and end of the period would suggest. Actually, money wages had remained practically at a standstill from 1794, when Alexander von Humboldt made his estimate, until the 1880's.⁵² The imposition of industrialism upon the basically stagnant economy by the Porfirian government and foreign investors caused a rise in prices that was not compensated for by higher wages. The rapid growth of railroads (with which Schiff and Cassel were intimately involved) and the burgeoning mining industry ended the long years of isolation of the Mexican interior, increased the population of the interior, and correspondingly the

⁵⁰ Jewish Chronicle, January 15, 1909, p. 16.

⁵¹ "El desarrollo económico de México de 1877 a 1911," El Trimestre Económico, XXXII (México, julio-septiembre, 1965), 447. This information is based on data compiled by the Seminario de Historia Moderna de México.

⁵² Frank Tannenbaum, The Mexican Agrarian Revolution (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 144. Tannenbaum cites Revista Quincenal Organo del Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, No. 10 (May 1925), pp. 15-18.

demand for food and clothing, a demand which Mexican agriculture was unable to meet. The added costs of imported food, of taxes, import duties, and transportation raised the basic cost of living. Thus, rising prices combined with a practically stationary money wage lowered the real wages of the Mexican worker during the Porfiriato.⁵³

A sharp drop can be demonstrated at just the time when Jewish colonization projects in Mexico were being seriously considered. Real wages declined from the estimated base of 32 centavos a day in 1877 to a low of 28 centavos in 1892.⁵⁴ Between the years 1892 and 1898 there was a considerable increase in real wages from a daily average of 28 to 39 centavos. As a result, the fall of 23 percent back to 30 centavos in 1911 represented a real hardship and forced the lowering of an already subsistence standard of living. Nor was the rise and fall felt evenly by wage earners in all sectors of the economy. Agricultural workers, who comprised over three fifths of the population, were the only group that endured a real wage loss between 1877 and 1911. Manufacturing workers who had enjoyed an increase of almost one hundred percent between 1892 and 1898 were forced to adjust to a decline to an earlier standard within four short years. Mine workers, on the other hand, more than doubled their daily wage between 1892 when the low of 30 centavos was recorded and 1911 when the daily average reached

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 145-149.

⁵⁴ Rosenzweig, p. 447.

72 centavos. Figure 9 illustrates the fluctuations in the real daily wage in agriculture, manufacturing, and mining from 1877 to 1911.

Figure 9.

Minimum Real Daily Wages in Various
Mexican Industries: 1877-1911 (at 1900 prices).⁵⁵

Year	Aggregate	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Mining
1877	32	32	32	32
1885	29	27	34	31
1892	28	26	26	30
1898	39	37	50	47
1902	33	32	36	43
1911	30	27	36	72

For the purpose of understanding why Jewish agencies could not in good conscience send European Jews to Mexico, the general wage level which fell to its lowest point in 1892 - the year of decision for the Hirsch and Samuel projects - is sufficient reason. For the purpose of understanding the Mexican Revolution, however, the wage statistics suggest that there is merit in Stanley Stein's suggestion that the Mexican economy was not "stagnant" in the years preceding the Revolution.⁵⁶ Rather it was an unevenly developing economy, and the agricultural sector, which supported the majority of the Mexican people,

⁵⁵ Rosenzweig, p. 447.

⁵⁶ Stanley J. Stein, "Latin American Historiography: Status and Research Opportunities" in Latin American History: Essays in Its Study and Teaching, 1898-1965, ed. Howard E. Cline (Austin and London: University of Texas Press for The Conference on Latin American History, 1967), p. 580.

lagged behind both the manufacturing and mining sectors. With the end of the railroad building boom of the 1880's the real wage of the manufacturing worker fell disastrously. Thus, two important sectors of the economy, exposed to the phenomenon of higher expectations, were forced to accept lower wages, but could not be forced to accept them without complaint as they had in earlier more innocent days.

The low wages mentioned by Jacob Schiff as his reason for deciding against the project certainly provided a valid reason for the adverse decision. Schiff's October letter to Baron Hirsch suggests another factor which may well have been just as significant. The American social service agencies were overwhelmed trying to answer the appeals for help from Jews newly arrived in the United States.⁵⁷ Of the 248,026 Jewish immigrants who reached the United States in 1881 and 1882, thousands arrived penniless and with no families to help them.⁵⁸ The needs of these immigrants for such basics as food, clothing, housing, medical care, and jobs extended the available services to the breaking point. The American Jews simply did not have the personnel or the energy to assume the added responsibility of supervising colonies in Mexico, or even to organize the Jews who lived in Mexico and to prepare them to carry out such an ambitious project.

⁵⁷ Adler, II, 91.

⁵⁸ Wischnitzer, p. 289.

Beside the low wages in Mexico and the involvement of the American Jewish agencies in absorbing and placing immigrants in the United States, two other factors may have influenced the decision not to colonize in Mexico. One factor was the uncompromising opposition of the conservative Catholic party. The position of the Catholic press, firm in its conviction that non-Catholic immigration was not only undesirable but "a social crime," was certainly well known to the Jewish men investigating immigration prospects in Mexico.⁵⁹ Indeed Rabbi Cohen of Galveston, in the very report which stated that the Mexican government favored Jewish colonization, warned that the people of Mexico were not friendly to Jews.⁶⁰ Although the conservatives were not at the time a political power, the period between 1887 and 1892 was characterized by bitter polemics carried out by the liberal and conservative press. In his periodical, Germania, the German Jew, Isidoro Epstein, warned that the Ultra-Montane party did indeed pose a threat to freedom of conscience in Mexico and was not to be taken lightly.⁶¹ The investigators from the United States may well have believed that making Spanish speaking farmers of Russian Jews would be problem enough without the added difficulty of possible harassment and anti-semitic outbreaks.

Another factor, perhaps as significant as Catholic opposition, may have influenced Jacob Schiff's decision.

⁵⁹ El Tiempo, April 17, 1889.

⁶⁰ Der Israelite, August 27, 1891.

⁶¹ "Die Ultra Montanen in Mexiko," Germania, December 15, 1888.

Although this was a period when Mexicans favored Europeans, there was strong opposition in Mexico to any project sponsored by or dominated by the United States. The Mexicans especially feared that settlements in Baja California or near the northern frontier might be steps toward the further emaciation of Mexican territory.⁶² Mexico blamed the loss of Texas on the encouragement of Anglo colonization in that state. This, plus the loss of half of the territory of the Republic of Mexico in the disastrous War of 1848, gave the Mexicans good reason to fear further incursions by the North Americans.

El Financiero Mexicano voiced its opposition to North American domination. As for immigration, the paper that usually made its judgments on a strictly economic basis, adopted the positivist "racial elite" argument as its criterion for desirable immigration, thus implying opposition to colonies of Russian Jews. One article stated:

All of Mexico agrees that European immigration is preferable to North American, . . . and the class of European that is needed here are Germans, Austrians, Frenchmen, Swedes, Norwegians, northern Italians, Danes and Swiss. These people would soon take on the national character and merge with the mass of the population. By bringing fresh blood into the country they would add to the vigor of the native race. . . .⁶³

Xenophobia, directed particularly against foreign groups who controlled Mexican wealth and kept themselves apart from the Mexicans would increase in strength in the coming years and

⁶² González Navarro, La Colonización, p. 59.

⁶³ El Financiero Mexicano, October 13, 1888.

make of the Mexican Revolution a nationalistic and anti-foreign, as well as social revolution. Any one of these factors - low wages, overwhelming immigration work in New York, anti-semitism, and xenophobia in Mexico - could well have decided the prospective colonizers to abandon the project.

Whatever the true explanation for the failure of the project to materialize, the reason was not lack of cooperation from the Mexican government. The government wanted very much to attract a large Jewish immigration. President Díaz not only made an offer of a territorial concession large enough to accommodate a sizable colony (an island off the Mexican coast), but also offered to pay the expenses of a scientific commission to investigate the territory under consideration.⁶⁴

Many years later, Israel Zangwill (who was never one to withdraw from problems), the President of the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO), lamented that his organization was not yet in existence in 1891 to take advantage of the "sincere offer" made by the Díaz government.⁶⁵ There was at the time no ITO intent on finding a national homeland for Jews outside of Palestine. Nor was there any single unified Jewish organization with the resources to manage such a project.

⁶⁴ Menorah Journal, VI (August 1920), p. 199. Also Letter from Jacob Schiff to A. S. Solomons, July 20, 1891 in "Jacob Schiff Papers," AJA, Microfilm #714.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The few Jews in Mexico under Lionel Samuel's leadership - Jacob Schiff in New York corresponding with Baron Hirsch in Paris, and Rabbi Henry Cohen finding out what he could from his home in Galveston - all represent uncoordinated and separate efforts of a few individuals. No one of them combined the advantages of being large enough, and powerful enough, and close enough geographically to undertake the responsibility of supervising a mass immigration of Russian Jews to Mexico.

During these very years when the European and American Jews were considering bringing Russian Jews to Mexico, another Jewish man in Mexico was engaged in his own private campaign to encourage Jewish immigration.

The ubiquitous Francisco Rivas, the marrano Jew and classical language professor, may very probably have been one of Porfirio Díaz' paid immigration agents, so perfectly did he echo the government position as he propagandized the advantages and benefits of the Mexican nation. Rivas did not, however, direct his efforts toward attracting Russian Jews to Mexico. By distributing his periodicals in Turkey, he attempted to encourage the Sephardic Jews of that country to immigrate to Mexico.

During the last half of the nineteenth century several Jewish periodicals were published in Turkey in the Ladino language.⁶⁶ Although Ladino is regarded as a Jewish dialect of Spanish, it is really almost pure sixteenth-century

⁶⁶ The Jewish Encyclopedia, IX (New York: Funk and Wagnall, 1942), 610.

Castillian Spanish preserved by the heirs of the Jewish exiles from Spain.⁶⁷ In the first issue of his periodical, El Sábado Secreto dated February 9, 1889, Francisco Rivas revealed his familiarity with the Ladino press of Constantinople as he invited the editors of two of the Turkish papers to correspond with him. Although only the February 9th issue with this title is available in the United States (and none in Mexico), Rivas informed Rabbi Zielonka that he published seven issues of El Sábado Secreto with the sole purpose of encouraging Sephardic Jews from Turkey to immigrate to Mexico. Rivas distributed the papers through his fellow journalists in Constantinople.⁶⁸

In April 1889 Rivas changed the name of his paper to El Sábado and published this periodical until August of the same year. All seven issues of El Sábado are to be found in the United States, and each issue includes at least one article extolling the riches, the opportunities, and the liberalism of Mexico.⁶⁹ In one issue Rivas urged the immigrants to come because "Mexico needs arms to cultivate its rich and fertile soil." He explained the advantages of

⁶⁷ El Sábado (México), April 27, 1889. Also interview with Rubén Mazal, December 5, 1969.

⁶⁸ Martin Zielonka, "A Spanish-American Jewish Periodical," Publications of AJHS, XXIII (1915), 129-135.

⁶⁹ El Sábado (México, April 27 through August 6, 1889). Single copies of the seven issues of El Sábado as well as seven issues of La Luz de Sábado and one issue of El Sábado Secreto are filed in the library of the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts and are on microfilm at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

the terrenos baldíos, the uncultivated lands owned by the government that could be purchased for very little and "quickly made productive." Francisco Rivas, truly dedicated to the development of Mexico, believed that the exchange of publications initiated by him between Mexico and Constantinople would not only attract immigrants, but "might be instrumental in developing commerce between Mexico and Turkey that would be beneficial to both nations."⁷⁰

The following excerpt from El Sábado is typical of the colonization articles regularly published by Francisco Rivas:

We do not know why Jews would remain in any country where they are suspected, hated, and persecuted. Why not emigrate to this generous America where hospitality invites them to cross the seas in search of liberty and independence. . . . Let thousands come to increase the number of hard working citizens that this Republic needs to develop its resources and its commerce. . . . Mexico opens its ports to European, Asiatic, or African immigration with neither racial nor religious distinction. Here the Church is independent of the State and there is absolute liberty of religion so that citizens have the right to profess whatever religious ideas they prefer. . . . Let the persecuted leave the inhumane lands and come to the land where the Eternal has planted the Tree of Liberty.⁷¹

Although Francisco Rivas suspended publication of his periodical in August 1889, he continued his efforts to bring immigration to Mexico. In 1892 he was in New York City

⁷⁰ El Sábado, June 1, 1889.

⁷¹ El Sábado, May 15, 1889.

and took advantage of a personal interview with a reporter from a Jewish publication in New York to announce that:

Mexico would welcome the immigration of an industrious and enterprising number of Jews. The country, with its natural wealth, salubrious climate, and liberality of laws, offers opportunities for all those who are willing to devote themselves to a life of industrial and mercantile occupations.⁷²

Although the article emphasized Rivas' distinguished career as a language professor and Jewish scholar and described his fine library of Hebrew books, the statement that Rivas made indicates that the purpose of his visit was related to Jewish immigration to Mexico.

In 1905 when Victor Harris was in Mexico he was invited to the Rivas home. Here the Professor showed Harris his extensive correspondence with prominent Jews in the United States and Europe concerning Jewish immigration. However, in Harris' words, "The project came to naught as the mills of the gods grind slowly, especially when cold charity is concerned."⁷³

After 1892 the Jewish organizations set aside serious consideration of Mexico as a site for colonization. The Jewish Colonization Association of Baron de Hirsch concentrated

⁷² The Menorah, XIII, November 6, 1892.

⁷³ Victor Harris, p. 15. The whole truth about Francisco Rivas will probably never be known. At his death he left his valuable library and his papers to a servant who sold them to a Mexico City book dealer who sold the collection piecemeal.

on colonies in Argentina, Brazil, and Canada.⁷⁴ The American Jews established colonies and agricultural training schools in Woodbine, New Jersey and in the midwest as part of an effort to settle Jews outside of crowded New York City.⁷⁵ The Zionist organization, which held its first congress in 1897 under the leadership of Theodore Herzl, worked toward the ultimate goal of a "publicly recognized, legally secured" Jewish state in Palestine.⁷⁶

In the meantime the Mexican government pursued its policy of generous land offers, privileges, and tax exemptions in a fruitless effort to attract large-scale immigration to Mexico. By 1898 President Díaz himself admitted, "In the matter of colonization we have not had good results."⁷⁷

As the discouraging evidence accumulated the government recognized that in spite of laws "generous almost to the point of being ludicrous," colonization policy had been a failure.⁷⁸ French, Belgian, and Italian colonies, so optimistically initiated in the early days of the Díaz regime had all failed.⁷⁹ One Mexican analyst reported in 1904 that the

⁷⁴ For a follow-up study of one Hirsch colony, see Morton D. Winsberg, Colonia Baron Hirsch: A Jewish Agricultural Colony in Argentina.

⁷⁵ New York Times, May 28, 1894.

⁷⁶ Grayzel, p. 675.

⁷⁷ "President Díaz to Mexican Congress, April 1, 1898," Los Presidentes Antes de La Nación, II, 523.

⁷⁸ Gayol, p. 145.

⁷⁹ González Ramírez, Las instituciones sociales, p. 379. See also González Navarro, La Colonización, pp. 37-46.

population of the six Italian colonies formed "about twenty years ago with 2,542 people" had dwindled to "98 adults and 68 children born in Mexico."⁸⁰

As for spontaneous immigration the tiny numbers which are recorded only as "total number of foreigners in Mexico" led one writer to observe, "It is saddening to compare the advantages offered to colonists and the disdain which has been the response."⁸¹ In 1900 the foreign population in Mexico was only 57,000, and facing the discouraging truth the Mexican government assigned experts to analyze the failure and to make recommendations for future policy. From 1903 to 1909 the annual reports presented to the Secretary of Development offered various explanations such as poor soil, unhealthy climate, lack of communications, and the latifundia system of huge unproductive landholdings.⁸²

A study by the late Sanford A. Mosk suggests a correlation between the hacienda system and low immigration.⁸³ In Mexico the system of huge holdings was intensified by the anti-corporatist laws of the Reforma which effectively deprived the Indian of his communal lands. The landless

⁸⁰ Gayol, p. 149. Cf., González Navarro gives the number of Italian colonists as 2,608 in 1881-1882 and 217 in 1908, p. 46.

⁸¹ José Covarrubias, Varios informes sobre tierras y colonización (México: Secretaría de Fomento, 1912), p. 323.

⁸² Boletín de la Secretaría de Fomento (México, 1903-1909).

⁸³ Sanford A. Mosk, "Latin America Versus the United States," in Do the Americas Have a Common Heritage? A Critique of the Bolton Theory, ed. Lewis Hanke (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 174-176.

Indians were converted into debt peons, providing a ready and cheap supply of labor. Immigrants, therefore, found little good land available for purchase and almost no opportunity for agricultural work at a living wage. The admission of failure in their efforts to attract foreign colonization and the subsequent evaluation of the failure led to a gradual change in government policy.

Reports that effectively influenced colonization policy were presented by José Covarrubias in 1902 and 1906 and were later included in an expanded study published in 1912. Covarrubias, as colonization consultant to the Díaz government, found that the surveys of vacant lands made by speculative entrepreneurs, were inexact, unmarked, and impossible to check. He stressed the importance of mathematically exact land surveys and recommended that a geographic commission be organized to complete a full study of the Mexican topography.⁸⁴ Covarrubias also emphasized the purpose of colonization was not to increase the population, but to increase the wealth of the country. On the basis of this purely objective standard, he recommended that the government discontinue its sponsorship of foreign agricultural colonies and concentrate its efforts on creating conditions that would encourage the development of Mexican land by Mexican peons, and at the same time attract spontaneous

⁸⁴ Covarrubias, Varios informes, pp. 29, 46-47.

immigration. Good roads, irrigation works, excellent schools, and free political and social institutions were recommended as far more effective measures for developing the Mexican nation than the indiscriminate and overly generous colonization contracts.⁸⁵

During this period of developing nationalism Mexican intellectuals and journalists were objecting to the favoritism shown to foreigners. Not only had the Díaz government failed to attract vast numbers of European immigrants, but the numbers of Mexicans who emigrated to the United States was almost double the number of foreign immigrants to Mexico. Figure 10 compares the number of Mexicans in the United States and the number of foreigners in Mexico.

Figure 10.⁸⁶

Mexicans in the United States		Foreigners in Mexico	
1890	77,853	1895	48,668
1900	103,393	1900	57,000
1910	221,915	1910	116,527

Critics on the right and the left berated the Díaz regime for the privileges granted to foreigners compared to the neglect of Mexican nationals, and recommended projects of "auto-colonization" which would develop Mexico by means of the redistribution and training of native Mexicans.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 351 and 359.

⁸⁶ González Navarro, p. 123. Sources cited are Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1916 and the Censo de Mexico, 1890, 1900, and 1910.

⁸⁷ González Ramírez, pp. 386-389.

While government experts criticized the colonization policy on the basis of its failure to increase the national wealth, the Catholic press, in the tradition of Las Casas (the sixteenth-century defender of the Indians), reproached the government for neglecting the faithful Indian while it showered favor upon the pagan Chinese and Mormon colonists.⁸⁸ Other writers criticized the latifundia system and the low wage scale as the cause of both the failure to attract immigrants and the miserable condition of the Indians.⁸⁹ The program of the Liberal Party, published in 1906 by precursors of the Revolution, the Flores Magón brothers, held the Díaz government responsible for the forced exodus of Mexican nationals and the consequent "depopulation of Mexico."⁹⁰

The decade preceding the outbreak of the Revolution was one of self-criticism and reevaluation. As for positivism, the failure of colonization policy was only one more proof that the elitist philosophy borrowed from Europe was inapplicable to Mexican life in the twentieth century. The years from 1900 to 1910 were characterized by a new self-awareness of the Mexican nation as an entity with a distinctive national history and a distinctive personality.

⁸⁸ El País, June 5, 1899; July 16, 1900; August 22, 1906.

⁸⁹ González Navarro, p. 133. See also Covarrubias, Varios informes, p. 371.

⁹⁰ González Navarro, p. 135. "Program of the Liberal Party, 1906" is included in The Modern Age, Vol. II of History of Latin American Civilization, ed. Lewis Hanke (Irvine: University of California, 1967), 280-283.

The work of Justo Sierra, the reformed ex-positivist, and of Andrés Molina Enríquez were particularly influential in articulating the nationalism that would provide the basis for the singularly Mexican character of the social revolution. Both Sierra and Molina Enríquez recognized the mestizo as the true Mexican, formed by the fusion of Indian and Spanish blood and culture. While Sierra stressed the European role as the decisive element in the vigor of the mestizo race, the younger man defined the mestizo as "an Indian modified by Spanish blood."⁹¹ The recognition of the Indian heritage as the basis of the "truly national population" and the pride in being Mexican reflected the growing anti-foreign sentiment in Mexico and contributed to the modification of the earlier policy favoring foreign colonization.

When Jewish organizations once more expressed interest in colonization in Mexico, they found that the temper, if not the official policy, of the Díaz government had considerably changed. In 1905 Israel Zangwill, a former leader of the British Zionists, broke with the Zionist organization and formed the Jewish Territorial Organization (commonly abbreviated ITO). In Zangwill's view, the Zionists were hopelessly Utopian in limiting their goals to the realization of a Jewish state in Palestine. The ITO would direct its efforts "to the establishment of an autonomous Jewish settlement under

⁹¹ Andrés Molina Enríquez, Los grandes problemas nacionales (México: A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), pp. 258 and 306-307. Cf. Justo Sierra, The Political Evolution of the Mexican People (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 97-98.

a free government" anywhere in the world that seemed to offer prospects of political freedom and economic success.⁹² The new organization began a search for a suitable territory, and once again, interest turned to Mexico.

The renewed effort of the Jewish agencies came at just the time that the Mexican government was in the process of reevaluating the policy that had for so long offered special privileges and inducements to foreigners. As a result, in 1905 when Victor Harris spoke with the Vice President of the Republic, Ramón Corral (incidentally, one of the most deservedly unpopular men in the government). He answered Harris' questions in ambiguous fashion and referred him to the Department of Development. Harris did not succeed in seeing the Secretary, but spoke with a minor official whose sole knowledge of Jews was limited to a single introduction to Mr. Speyer and shopping at the Esmeralda jewelry store. The official told Harris about the availability of unoccupied lands which the government was prepared to sell to any group or private developer.⁹³

The days were past when the Mexican government was willing to grant extensive tracts of land in the hope that great agricultural colonies would result. Most of the earlier projects that had been planned for thousands of colonists

⁹² Grayzel, p. 683.

⁹³ Harris, pp. 38-39.

had materialized, if at all, with only a few dozen colonists.⁹⁴

Harris was impressed with the stretches of fertile lands in the north of Mexico, and he compared this area (as Jacob Schiff had done in 1891) with the Argentine territory where Baron Hirsch had successfully established some fifteen colonies.⁹⁵ Harris suggested that an important Jewish leader should come to Mexico and speak to President Díaz regarding Jewish colonization.⁹⁶ One of the most familiar Jewish names in Mexico was "Guggenheim." Daniel Guggenheim, the head of the giant mining firm and recent donor of a "Guggenheim Wing" to the American Hospital in Mexico City, was also a member of the board of the ITO. Guggenheim made a trip to Mexico to see Díaz, but he became ill and returned to New York without seeing the President.⁹⁷

Another man well known in Mexico's official circles, John DeKay of London, did speak to President Díaz at length regarding Jewish immigration.⁹⁸ Encouraged by the President's favorable attitude which DeKay reported to the London periodicals, the ITO sent Joseph Fels to Mexico to confer with the President about the possibilities for securing

⁹⁴ González Navarro, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Harris, p. 54.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁷ Hayehoodi (London), November 3, 1909), p. 13.

⁹⁸ The Jewish Chronicle (London), January 15, 1909, p. 16.

a large territory for an autonomous Jewish colony.⁹⁹

President Díaz was very enthusiastic about a large-scale Jewish immigration. He told both DeKay and Fels that Jewish immigrants could be of great benefit to Mexico in the development of commerce and industry and as an example of diligence and thrift to the Mexican people. He was not willing, however, to offer any kind of territorial concession. The government would be willing to sell parcels of land to Jews just as to anyone else, but the President discouraged Jewish agricultural colonization.¹⁰⁰

The Mexican President had learned from bitter experience that artificial agricultural colonies were unlikely to succeed in bringing prosperity to either the colonists or to the Mexican nation. The days of free land titles and generous concessions of Mexican territory to foreigners were over well before the changes brought about by the Social Revolution and the Constitution of 1917. As a result of the recommendations of Covarrubias and other analysts, the laws themselves were changed in 1909 while Porfirio Díaz was still the undisputed leader of Mexico. The law of December 18, 1909 rescinded the President's authority to dispose of government owned lands and placed all authority

⁹⁹ Menorah Journal, VI (August 1920), p. 199.

¹⁰⁰ Jewish Chronicle, January 15, 1909 and Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB (1923), p. 425.

over the national territory in the hands of the Department of Agriculture while a careful resurvey and demarcation was being carried out by a scientific commission.¹⁰¹ Israel Zangwill, recalling the offer made by the Díaz government in 1890, wrote that "ITO, like Germany, began to feel that it had come too late."¹⁰²

Revolution in Mexico and war in Europe temporarily stopped all talk of colonization. After the Armistice and a renewed exodus of Jews from eastern Europe, projects once again multiplied both among private entrepreneurs and Jewish agencies. A Chicago man named Paul Rothenberg organized The Mexican Jewish Colonization Association in 1921. Jewish agencies responded to the news with statements that a disinterested organization, rather than a private firm, should evaluate and possibly sponsor colonization in Mexico.¹⁰³ The agencies proceeded to inquire about prospects for colonization and President Alvaro Obregón responded with a letter dated May 10, 1922, that was published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. The President wrote:

In reference to our conversation relative to the immigration of Russian Jews to the Republic of Mexico, I am pleased to advise you that the Government which I have the honor of presiding over would say that if the emigrants want to acquire any real estate in the Republic of

101 J. M. Bejarano, "Colonization in Mexico," Nation, May 23, 1923, p. 608.

102 Menorah Journal, VI (August 1920), p. 199.

103 American Jewish Year Book, XXV (1923), p. 60. See also Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico," CCYB, p. 435.

Mexico, they must naturalize themselves as Mexican citizens, since our statutes establish that foreigners shall not acquire properties within a zone of one hundred kilometers parallel to the borders and fifty kilometers from the seaside. . . . In the country there are several million hectares of land appropriated for colonization purposes, a great part of which is (suitable) for agriculture and irrigation. You may be sure that the emigrants (who abide by the provisions of the Constitution) for the acquisition of property, will enjoy the guarantees, security, and protection which are granted to all citizens of the Republic of Mexico.¹⁰⁴

Another letter from President Obregón dated October 31, 1922 made it clear that it was impossible for the Mexican government to consider granting "exclusive privileges to the Jews because such provisions have been abolished by the Constitution under which we are governed." The President added, however,

that the Government of Mexico is desirous of having vast extensions of territory colonized and appropriated for agriculture, and is willing, because of that, to give all kinds of facilities to whomever might come to colonize them. . . . The Jews . . . may send their representative to study the case thoroughly so as to see whether the established conditions are suitable.¹⁰⁵

The American Jewish Congress volunteered to accept the President's offer to investigate the prospects for colonization in Mexico and to report its findings to the ITO. By January 1923 the AJC not only vetoed the colonization

¹⁰⁴ Zielonka, *loc.cit.* p. 435. Copies of the two Obregón letters, May 10 and October 31, 1922, in "Martin Zielonka and El Sábado," AJA, Microfilm.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

project, but discouraged all Jewish immigration to Mexico.

Their report said:

It now remains our solemn and imperative duty to make it clear to all those who may be interested that Mexico cannot at this time become a place of refuge for those who must, without delay, find work and opportunities of self support for themselves and their families.¹⁰⁶

During the months that the colonization project was under consideration Rabbi Zielonka corresponded with Gunther Lessing, an attorney in Mexico who had served as a legal adviser to the Constitutional government. Lessing described several other colonization proposals including one that (if it materialized) would be financed by Jewish agencies in Rotterdam, Paris, and Bucharest.¹⁰⁷ Lessing advised Rabbi Zielonka that colonization was practicable only if the American Jewish agencies would furnish enough money to buy fertile privately owned lands rather than the terrenos baldíos which required extensive irrigation.¹⁰⁸

Rabbi Zielonka, however, did not favor colonization in Mexico. His report to the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1923 summarized the arguments against Jewish agricultural colonies in Mexico. In support of his position the Rabbi quoted an American geologist who said:

The establishment of a colony in this desert territory would be the same as exile . . . (and)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 425-426, citing The Index, January 1923.

¹⁰⁷ "Gunther Lessing to Rabbi Martin Zielonka," November 17, 1922 in "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence," AJA, Microfilm 600a.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

I question very much whether the Jews of Europe could readily adapt themselves to (the more favorable) eastern lowlands.¹⁰⁹

Rabbi Zielonka added other objections - low wages, limited railroad and marketing facilities, too few large consuming centers, and the need for vast irrigation projects that would cost millions of dollars.¹¹⁰ Maurice Hexter in 1925 mentioned as obstacles "the impossibility and danger of competing with peon labor," and "the danger of banditry in the countryside."¹¹¹

Rabbi Zielonka and Maurice Hexter were right about the low wages. Although manufacturing and transportation increased toward the end of the 1920's, in 1925 the Mexican daily wage was only one-fourteenth that of the American worker.¹¹² As for agricultural workers, Senator Ernest Gruening found in 1926 that some peons were still working on haciendas at wages as low as twenty five centavos a day, and the governor of Guanajuato still used his state guard to attack peasants "audacious enough to ask for higher pay." In 1923 Gruening visited fourteen haciendas, and discovered no instance of wage increases or decreases within the memory of the oldest workers.¹¹³

109 Zielonka, CCYB, p. 437.

110 Ibid.

111 Hexter, pp. 280 and 193.

112 Tannenbaum, pp. 150-151.

113 Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York and London: Century Co., 1928), pp. 152-153 and 137.

In spite of the depressing economic prospects, discussions of colonization projects continued into 1925. Ultimately, with the full support of Rabbi Zielonka, the 1923 adverse decision of the AJC would prevail. In August 1924, however, President-elect Plutarco Elias Calles issued a statement which was published by the New York Daily News, and which became known as "Mexico's Invitation to the Jews." The warmth of the future President's remarks did indeed seem a sincere invitation. A few significant excerpts from the 550 word statement suggest that the attitude of the Mexican President toward Jewish immigration and colonization did not differ greatly from that of the old dictator Porfirio Díaz:

The Government of Mexico is prepared to welcome warmly the immigration of Jews from eastern Europe to engage there in both agricultural and industrial pursuits. . . . The Government of Mexico is even ready to grant tracts of land for Jewish colonization. . . . I have assured the representative of the American Jewish Congress and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society that if they could secure a measure of financial support from American Jewry, I would be prepared to ask my Government . . . to grant a large tract of arable land for Jewish settlement. . . . I will also ask for the remission of all land taxes, for a reduction of railroad fares, and for the granting of other facilities for the settlers. . . . If the Jewish working masses are not for agriculture, this will present no obstacle under a Labor regime where systems of cooperative guilds . . . provide the means for employing tens of thousands of Jews in various branches of industry It would be . . . a distinct benefit to Mexico to manufacture within its own boundaries many items which it now has to import from other countries. . . .114

114 Hexter, p. 279. Dr. Hexter reprinted in full the Calles statement from the Daily News (New York), August 9, 1924.

President Díaz at the height of his career could hardly have offered more! The early dictator, however, would not have been obliged to "ask my government." President Calles believed that "a sum in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000 could give a start to this movement and furnish employment possibilities for Jewish immigrants."¹¹⁵

The amount of money was great, but larger sums had been spent for similar enterprises elsewhere. However, American Jews did not respond favorably to putting forth funds that would encourage the immigration of Jews to Mexico. Aside from the very practical difficulties involved in establishing industries that must eventually be self-sustaining, the response to President Calles' offer, as to the earlier projects, suggests that the emotional reaction of Jews to Mexico played a part in the decision. Perhaps Rabbi Zielonka's remarks best express the attitude of American Jews toward investment in Mexico:

I am not a Zionist, but I would prefer that the money for such projects be spent in Palestine rather than in Mexico. There we would have sentiment holding our immigrants to the soil. Let us realize that there is no future for Jewish farm colonies in Mexico.¹¹⁶

The veto of the AJC, supported by Rabbi Zielonka and by Dr. Maurice Hexter after further investigation, effectively ended serious consideration of financial investment in Jewish

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 279.

¹¹⁶ Zielonka, CCYB, p. 437.

colonization in Mexico in the 1920's.¹¹⁷ As in the Porfirian epoch, the decision could not be attributed to difficulties imposed by the laws of the Republic of Mexico.

In fact the Mexican laws in effect in 1922 and 1924 differed from the permissive Law of 1883 in the direction of greater protection for the colonist. Although they were required to become Mexican citizens in order to own land near the borders and coasts, colonists still enjoyed the exemptions and privileges provided by the Law of 1883. Exemptions from military service, from all taxes except municipal ones, from import and export duties on foodstuffs, machinery, tools, and breeding animals were still in effect; and bonuses and protection were offered to new industry and new cultivation.¹¹⁸

The major change in colonization law had occurred before the Mexican Revolution with the passage of the Law of December 18, 1909, which took from the President the authority to distribute contracts for national lands at his own discretion, and transferred this authority to the Department of Agriculture. The right of ownership, however was not conferred upon the colonization company, but titles were to be issued in the names of individual colonists.¹¹⁹ This provision was made to correct serious abuses under the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 426 and 437. Hexter, pp. 280-281.

¹¹⁸ J. M. Bejarano, Nation (1923), p. 608.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

old system which often resulted in profits to the company, the utter desolation of victimized colonists, and financial loss to the Mexican government.¹²⁰

Although the colonization laws in effect in revolutionary Mexico failed to attract Jewish agricultural colonies, Mexico's open immigration policy and, perhaps, the widely publicized invitation of President Calles did further encourage the spontaneous immigration of some nine thousand eastern European Jews in the postwar period.¹²¹

Late 1924 to 1926 were the peak years for Jewish immigration into Mexico, and all Mexicans did not share the hospitable attitude of President Calles. The Revista Yucatán of Mérida warned in regard to Jewish colonization:

That's all we need to complete our damnation! Calles wants to yield to the Jews so that they may fill themselves up like leeches and after sucking the blood, throw away the remains. . .¹²²

As Jewish immigration reached its peak, the complaints of Mexican as well as foreign artisans and shopkeepers led the government to enact restrictions on immigration for the first time in its history. A respected Mexican historian, illustrating the heightened nationalism of revolutionary Mexico, wrote in 1965 that the 1926 measures were taken in order to protect native workers from "the ruinous competition"

¹²⁰ Covarrubias, Varios informes (1912), p. 319.

¹²¹ Report of J. L. Weinberger to B'nai B'rith Mexican Committee, 1930, in "B'nai B'rith Mexican Bureau," AJA, Microfilm No. 841.

¹²² Hexter, p. 277, citing Revista Yucatán.

created by the immigrants who were "invading all branches of activity, supplanting our own (citizens) who had to abandon the territory and go to the United States in search of work."¹²³ The Law of Migration of 1926 imposed a tax on the immigrant and, to avoid competition with Mexican nationals, granted the President the authority to prohibit the immigration of workers into areas where work was scarce. Further measures enacted in 1930 and 1936 virutally closed immigration to all but those judged potentially "beneficial to the Mexican economy."¹²⁴

The restrictive policy was more than a means of protecting the Mexican worker. It was a practical manifestation of the Mexican nationalism realized by the social revolution. Consequently, when colonization discussions between Jewish agencies and the Mexican government began once again in the late 1930's, their failure was not unexpected.¹²⁵

In the forty-four year period between 1881 and 1925, while Jewish agencies searched for havens for the persecuted Jews of eastern Europe, Mexico had offered many legitimate opportunities for Jewish colonization.

The latifundia system which monopolized the best lands and exploited a servile corps of peon labor, the

¹²³ González Ramírez, Las instituciones sociales, p. 383.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 384.

¹²⁵ See Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana, VII, 447 and Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, VII, 512.

miserably low wage scale, and limited transportation and marketing facilities were sufficient reason for prospective colonists to look for more promising lands than Mexico. For Jewish people the feeling prevailed that the countryside of Mexico was no place for Jews.

Incidents such as the expulsion of Mr. Blumenkorn's sons from school in Puebla in 1859 and the threat to Dr. Eskenazi's life in 1904 were evidence of the hatred and superstition regarding Jews that existed in Mexico before the Revolution. The old hatreds instilled by three centuries of Spanish Catholic training did not die out with the Revolution. In 1920 Morris Riskind's uncle was asked by a Mexican neighbor to show his horns and tail, and in 1932 Carlton Beal's servant refused to believe that a guest in the Beal home had been a Jew because although she could understand how he could hid his tail, "what could he do with his horns?"¹²⁶ The annual celebration of burning Judas in effigy with blazing bonfires and hundreds of grotesque "Judas" dolls still goes on. A commentator on Porfirian life wrote of the paradox of a land where "the people still burn Judas in effigy while they learn to make bullets for the Revolution."¹²⁷ And in 1932 Carlton Beals believed that for the mass of the Mexican people:

the Jew is a terrible monster . . . not even human; he is a devil with horns, hoofs, and

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¹²⁶ Letter from Morris Riskind to Sam Michaels, October 31, 1969 and Carlton Beals, "Prospect in Mexico," Menorah Journal, XVIII (Spring 1932), 52.

¹²⁷ Diego Arenas Guzmán, Cincuenta retablos de la vida Porfiriano (México: B. Costa-Amic., 1966), p. 315.

tail. He is the image of the papier maché effigies of Judas burned every Saturday of Glory annually on every street corner the length and breadth of Mexico. These Judases are always made to look as horrible as possible, with ferocious teeth projecting faces, with scarlet horns and big cloven hoofs, and black barbed tails. To the average Mexican, this is the Jew who killed Christ, and the Jew who still survives.¹²⁸

Whether this heritage of ignorance and superstition was of real significance is of less importance than the fact that Jewish people believed that it was. The reason that no deliberate attempt to bring Jews to Mexico was ever made by Jewish agencies may well have been the attitude of world Jewry, which would have nodded its collective head in agreement with Rabbi Zielonka's dramatic statement that "The hand of the Inquisition still hangs heavy over Mexico and the word 'Jew' is only whispered here and there. . . ."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Beals, p. 58.

¹²⁹ Zielonka, CCYB, p. 430.

CONCLUSION

The last Jew in New Spain was an old man freed when the doors of the Inquisitorial prison were finally unlocked by the liberators of the colony in 1821. So goes the legend about the end of the Inquisition in Mexico which accompanied the achievement of independence from the Spanish Empire.

Although large numbers of Jews had settled in New Spain in spite of the prohibitions of the Spanish crown and the threat of the Inquisition, by the eighteenth century most of the secret Jews of the earlier colony had been effectively converted and their descendants were pious Catholics. Roman Catholicism remained the established Church of the short-lived Empire of Mexico and of the Republic which followed. Not until the laws of the Reforma were incorporated into the Constitution of 1857 were church and state permanently separated and freedom of religion guaranteed.

Contrary to common belief, there were always some Jews in Mexico. Aside from several Jewish pioneers who settled in Texas while that state was still a part of Mexico, the 1848 reports of American Jews involved in the Mexican War confirm that Jewish people - both native Mexican and new arrivals - lived and worshipped secretly in Mexico.¹

¹ Henry Cohen, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, II (1894), 142-143. Also Jacob Hirschhorn, "Reminiscences of a Volunteer," American Israelite, July 16, 1903, pp. 1, 4-5.

In 1853 the victory of the liberals, climaxing years of struggle against the conservative dictatorship of Santa Anna, was accompanied by a wave of optimism in Mexico's future. The victors had long held the conviction that once liberalism triumphed, Mexico, like her great neighbor to the north, would quickly become strong, populous, and rich. Their faith was somewhat justified by the immigration of European liberals to Mexico in the 1850's. One result of this immigration (stimulated by the combination of liberalism victorious in Mexico and defeated in Europe in the 1848 Revolutions) was an increase in the Jewish population of Mexico City to approximately one hundred families.²

The Mexican Reform movement was modeled on European liberalism, and one of its chief tenets was religious freedom. In the Reforma spirit of individualism and religious tolerance the Jews of Mexico City organized a community, held services in the Masonic Hall, and began to talk of building a synagogue. The Jewish Chronicle of London reported that "many educated Mexicans welcomed the idea of a synagogue in the capital," but discussions remained secret because of fear in "this deeply Catholic country" where the Jew is considered to be the incarnation of the devil.

The plans to identify themselves as Jews by building a synagogue did not materialize. The French Intervention

² Jewish Chronicle (London), March 14, 1862.

interrupted the incipient community as "many of the French socialists and democrats left the country," and in the chaotic years that followed the Jewish population of the capital city dropped to about twenty families in 1879.³

The Jewish population rose rapidly during the thirty-four year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and there were sufficient numbers of Jews to organize a community. Not until 1904, however, did the Jews of Mexico again attempt organized religious services as one congregation. By 1877 when Porfirio Díaz began his long rule, the tolerance of cultural diversity which had characterized the Reforma had given way to the positivist belief in one single standard of truth as demonstrated by science.

The officially adopted philosophy of positivism dominated Mexican intellectual and economic life during the years of the Restored Republic and the greater part of the Porfiriato. Positivism's emphasis upon empirically demonstrated truth arrived at through scientific method provided philosophic justification - if any was needed - for the Díaz policy of material development without regard to social needs. Effectively negating the spiritual element in human society, this emphasis upon the material and the demonstrable relegated religion to the status of superstition.

Even at the height of positivist prestige in Mexico, however, the very intellectuals responsible for teaching

³ Jewish Chronicle, November 21, 1862.
Der Israelite (Frankfort), December 10, 1879.

"truth" to the young generation of Mexicans at the National Preparatory School began to question the applicability of science to all aspects of human behavior.⁴

The questioning of the intellectuals combined with the effects of industrialism and the influx of foreign people, capital, and ideas to create an increasingly more open and cosmopolitan atmosphere in Mexico City. With intellectual and economic change came increased acknowledgement that Mexican society was composed of different peoples with different values. Groups within Mexican society were recognized as unique in cultural background and specific needs. As a result, by the last decade of the Díaz regime - the first decade of the twentieth century - this more open and accepting attitude permitted Jews to openly profess their religion, to form a community, and to begin to establish their own institutions.

In 1904 the Jews of Mexico City held religious services in observance of the annual High Holy Days at the Masonic Temple. No longer was Jewish observance in Mexico a secret. The Mexican Herald, the widely circulated English language daily in the capital published news of the services and also a report that the Jews of the city were planning to build a synagogue.⁵ By 1905 the Jewish services were not

⁴ Edmundo O'Gorman, "Justo Sierra y los orígenes de la Universidad de México, 1910," Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), pp. 195-196.

⁵ The Mexican Herald, September 17, 1904.

only publicized, but were open to the public so that Mexicans curious about the "peculiar rites of the Hebrews" might have the opportunity to find out for themselves what this strange people did in celebration of their religious holidays.⁶

The men who actively participated in Jewish affairs in the last years of the Porfiriato formed the nucleus of the modern Jewish community which developed in the 1920's with the immigration of several thousand Jews from eastern Europe. The group which formed the core of the Jewish community in Mexico was actually very small. Although there were somewhere between eight and fifteen thousand Jews in Mexico in 1910, the active community counted at most a few hundred families.

The Díaz government, which had actively pursued European immigration, acknowledged that its efforts had not succeeded. Instead of large numbers of European immigrants who would man new industries in Mexico, most of the foreigners in Mexico were just that - foreigners temporarily in Mexico City for business reasons.

The rule of Porfirio Díaz has been characterized as a thirty-four year period of official xenophilia.⁷ President Díaz, determined to strengthen Mexico by making the country rich, believed that foreign money and foreign expertise were

⁶ Ibid., September 30, 1905.

⁷ Moisés González Navarro, Historia moderna de México, El Porfiriato, La vida social, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Editorial Hermes, 1960), p. 163.

essential to Mexican development. Díaz and his clique of científico advisers, had little faith in the ability of the Mexicans to bring about the changes that the elite deemed necessary. They did, however, have faith in immigration, and initiated an active program designed to encourage European immigration to Mexico. The generous terms of the 1883 law relative to the acquisition of uncultivated lands owned by the government - terrenos baldíos - clearly expressed this official xenophilia. However, in spite of offering to foreigners incentives and privileges that were denied to native Mexicans, immigrants did not choose to go to Mexico.

The hacienda system which concentrated all of the best land in the hands of a few wealthy owners limited the availability of productive land, while the labor supply of peons tied to the land by debt resulted in a wage scale far too low to provide incentive in European immigrants.⁸ The limited opportunity for ownership of desirable land explains the small numbers of Europeans who came to Mexico as farmers, but the fact is that Jewish emigrants from Europe were not essentially farmers. In fact Jews had been urbanized for centuries by prohibitions against their owning land in Europe. The low wage scale prevailing in Mexico, however, did serve as an effective obstacle to the immigration of both Jewish and non-Jewish proletariat. An illustration of Mexico's

⁸ Ibid., p. 163. See also Sanford A. Mosk, "Latin America Versus the United States," in Do the Americas Have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Theory, ed. Lewis Hanke (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 174-176.

failure to attract brazos, the labor that the government considered essential for the development of Mexican industry, is provided by the census of 1910 which shows that less than one percent of the total population of the country was foreign born.⁹ In contrast to the United States and Argentina where immigrants provided a large part of the rural and urban labor force, immigrants to Mexico were few, and were for the most part middle class businessmen.

The nineteenth century Jewish immigrant to Mexico was similar in many respects to the non-Jewish immigrant. These men came from Germany, Austria, England, France, and the United States, and only in the late years of the Porfiriato from the Turkish Empire and from eastern Europe. They were similar in cultural background to the non-Jewish immigrant from enlightened western Europe. In Mexico they identified themselves as nationals of their native lands and socialized with their compatriots from Europe.

Since before the days of Porfirio Díaz foreigners had lived in Mexico in their separate colonies, socially isolated from the Mexicans, except for formal contacts with the científico elite who were their protectors and promoters. They usually reserved the responsible and highly paid positions in their industries for men of their own nationality as they accumulated wealth which was seldom spent in Mexico.¹⁰ The

⁹ México. Secretaría de Economía, Estadísticas sociales del Porfiriato: 1877-1910 (México: Dirección General de Estadística, 1956), p. 192.

¹⁰ Henry Bamford Parkes, A History of Mexico, Sentry Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), p. 309.

immigrants made little effort to incorporate themselves into the Mexican community and few of them acquired Mexican citizenship. The number of immigrants who manifested their loyalty to the Mexican nation by becoming naturalized citizens numbered only 30,560 for the entire period from 1828 to 1952. A comparison with the number of foreigners living in Mexico - 57,634 in 1900 and 116,527 in 1910 - dramatically illustrates the nonassimilation of foreign groups.¹¹

The nineteenth century European in Mexico, whether Jew, Christian, or atheist, was usually a businessman, a financier, or an agent of a foreign firm doing business there. A few also came as educators, writers, publishers, and other professionals, and as this essay has demonstrated, there were always a few soldiers of fortune among them. The reluctance of the majority of the Jews in Porfirian Mexico to participate actively in a Jewish community and to support the building of a synagogue can be explained by the pattern of Mexican history and by the nature of nineteenth century Jewish immigration.

The long years of internal disorder and foreign intervention led naturally to the conclusion that Mexico was not a stable, steadily developing country. Although the number of foreigners in Mexico, including Jews, increased after

¹¹ Frederick C. Turner, The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 69. Turner cites Julio Durán Ochoa, Población (México: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1955), pp. 151, 164, 243.

1880, the fear of chaotic Mexico remained. While Porfirio Díaz ruled, peace prevailed, but as the perceptive Jacob Schiff noted in 1892, both immigrants and investors "would seek out Mexico with more confidence" if they knew what would follow the end of the Porfirian regime.¹² Uncertainty as to the future of Mexico after Díaz continued to inhibit formal Jewish organization even in the first decade of the twentieth century when there were several hundred men among the Jewish community desirous of organizing a permanent congregation. Others, however, were reluctant to commit themselves as Jews. Some argued that when President Díaz died, revolution would be a real possibility, and revolution might bring with it anti-Jewish outbreaks. Others feared even more a resurgence of Church power that might arouse a hostile public against the Jews.¹³ Most of the Jewish men in Mexico recognized the Porfirian peace as temporary, depending upon the good health and strong hand of the aging dictator.

The men who were the most prominent Jews in Mexico during the Porfiriato acted as an inhibiting factor in the projected building of a synagogue.

In the period of financial reconstruction and railroad building (roughly from 1880 to 1898), Jews were among the men who dominated the banking and railroad industries. In banking

¹² Letter from Jacob Schiff to Ernest Cassel, January 15, 1892 in "Jacob Schiff Papers," AJA, Microfilm roll No. 715.

¹³ Martin Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," American Israelite, July 30, 1908.

the Jews from Alsace established the National Bank of Mexico, and in this capacity enjoyed positions in the highest Mexican society. These Frenchmen, sons of Jewish families emancipated by the French Revolution, were ambitious individuals with no desire to limit their social contacts and perhaps endanger their prestige by association with a specifically Jewish endeavor. They had been assimilated in France; they assimilated easily in Mexico. These men were the leading Jews in Mexico, and their example and their decisions were accepted by the majority of the Jewish population of the country.

Ernest Cassel, an English financier active in the Mexican Central Railroad system, was actually a convert to Catholicism, although this was not known until his death in 1914.¹⁴ Although Cassel was a shareholder in Baron de Hirsch's Jewish Colonization Society and although he acted as the intermediary between Jacob Schiff and the Baron both in establishing the Hirsch Fund of New York and in the abortive project for colonizing Russian Jews in Mexico, Cassel obviously had no interest in Jewish religious affairs. Thus, the most prominent, the most wealthy, and the most influential Jews in Mexico in the nineteenth century in effect prevented the establishment of a formally organized Jewish community.

In spite of the failure of the Jews in Mexico to build a synagogue, they did succeed in establishing a Jewish community, or more correctly, two Jewish communities before 1910. After 1904 the service held in the Masonic Hall became an annual

¹⁴"Ernest Cassel" D.N.B. 1912-1921 (1922), p. 97.

event. The men who were responsible for organizing the services, chiefly Europeans and Americans participated in the first formal Jewish organization, the abortive Sociedad Emanuel in 1905, and in 1908 they organized a mutual benefit society.

Even before the Europeans held their first organized services, oriental Jews who had been emigrating from the near east and North Africa since about 1890, had organized their first synagogue in 1901. By 1908 this group supported at least two permanent congregations which met in converted homes and held daily morning and evening services. Although there was virtually no communication between these poor Turco peddlers and the affluent French Jewish bankers, the more religious among the European Jewish community were aware of the community of Arab and Ladino speaking Jews. The daily services were attended by those Europeans and Americans who were in mourning or who wished to attend Sabbath services.

Mexico City in the last decade of the Porfiriato was a modern and cosmopolitan city. Society was open and "there was more mingling of peoples of different races and creeds than in any city of comparable size in the United States.¹⁵

Mexico, however, was not the United States, and it could and would be said for many years that "Jew does not know Jew, and it is impossible to know who is a Jew and who is

¹⁵ Zielonka, "Letter from Mexico," July 16, 1908.

not in Mexico."¹⁶ In the countryside where illiteracy and superstition lingered, it would be many years before one could safely identify himself as a Jew. The threat to Sr. Eskenazi's life by a village priest is one example of the heritage of hate that lingered in rural Mexico. The experience of Anita Brenner provides another illustration.

When she was a child in her father's ranch in Aguascalientes, Miss Brenner's nurse introduced her to the popular image of the Jew. She told the little girl tales of cursed Jews with tails and horns, and warned that "when the Lord wants to punish naughty children, he sends a Jew in the night to steal them, and the Jew carries them away in a sack and eats them."¹⁷ At the time that the child was learning what Mexicans thought of Jews, she had no idea that she, herself, was Jewish. In the medieval atmosphere of the Mexican countryside the elder Brennens instinctively kept silent about their religion. Not until the family fled to Texas in the midst of the revolutionary violence did they openly profess their religion. In Mexico, as late as 1936, it was still said that "the term 'Jew' is in the Spanish language a term of reproach or scorn."¹⁸

¹⁶ Victor Harris, The Jew in Modern Mexico (Los Angeles, 1907), p. 14.

¹⁷ Anita Brenner, "Mexico - Another Promised Land," Menorah Journal, XIV (April 1928), p. 330.

¹⁸ Letter from William Mayer to Doctor Martin Zielonka dated December 22, 1936 in "B'nai B'rith Zielonka Correspondence," Microfilm no. 600b.

There was paradox, however, in the popular Mexican image of the Jew. While the heritage of three hundred years of Spanish Catholic teaching had made of the Jew a "bogie," there was another Jew, a romantic "legend" that was equally a part of Mexican belief.¹⁹ While the word judío was used to evoke the image of the evil Jew equated with the devil and the traitor Judas, the term Israelita evoked a romantic image of the suffering tribe of Israel. This paradox was evident in the romantic tales of a lovely Israelita maiden persecuted by the Inquisition told to Miss Brenner by a mule driver in the Mexican countryside. Although he also told the story of the wandering Jew, a poor old man condemned to walk forever, the mule driver was certain that in reality, old Jews had long beards and knives and were very wicked.²⁰

That warmth of feeling toward the real Jew could be expressed was evidenced in a compliment given to the five Spiegelberg brothers, prominent merchants in Santa Fe. At home in the Southwest since their father's service in the Mexican War, the brothers enjoyed pleasant relations with their Mexican neighbors. Indeed, it was said of them, "Los hermanos Jacob (the name of the oldest brother) son de misma gente que nuestro Redentor."²¹ That a Mexican

19
Brenner, p. 330.

20
Ibid., p. 335.

21
Letter from Flora Spiegelberg to Mr. Paul A.F. Walter, President of the New Mexico Historical Society dated January 13, 1935, in "Mexico. Biographies File," AJA.

voiced his recognition that the brothers were of the same people as the Redeemer supports Anita Brenner's conclusion that there is among Mexicans "a kind of emotional kinship with the Jews."²²

The romantic image of the suffering Israelita was a popular theme in nineteenth century Mexican literature. The image of the Jew as the sympathetic victim of fanatical Spain was also used as a political weapon with which Mexican liberals attacked the conservative clerical party. Not until the end of the century was the "legend" of the Israelita supplanted by an objective study of Jewish history and the Hebrew language.

Beginning in 1891 with the publication of a translation and commentary of the Song of Songs of Solomon, the professor of Hebrew, Dr. Jesús Díaz de León, introduced the study of Jewish history to Mexican higher education. The academic approach to Jewish culture begun by Dr. Díaz de León has continued in revolutionary Mexico.

The recognition of a community of living Jews in Mexico by the popular press was a development of the early twentieth century. In 1905 The Mexican Herald published an article that seemed designed to dispel fear among Mexicans of the Jewish population in their midst. "In the Anglo-Saxon nations, where opportunities are not denied to men because of their religious profession," editorialized The Herald, "Jews have become important in finance, but they do not own

²² Brenner, p. 335.

the largest fortunes. . . . They are a factor and an important one in the business life of the American metropolis, but they do not dominate it. . . ." The liberal daily said that in Mexico also, "thanks to the religious freedom won by the immortal Juárez," Jews are desirable and useful members of the community."²³ This article is indicative of the liberal public opinion in the capital city in the last years of the Porfiriato.

The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, affected the Jewish community in two chief respects. First of all, the Revolution caused most of the European and American Jews to leave Mexico. Illustrating the truism that "adversity fires zeal," the second effect of the Revolution was to bring together the diminished number of Jews in Mexico into a single community. At a meeting held in 1912 the professing Jews of Mexico established the Alianza Monte Sinai which served as both religious congregation and mutual benefit society. On a plot of land donated by Jacobo Granat, Monte Sinai in 1913 established a Jewish cemetery. The 1912 meeting represented a high point of cooperation between all the different groups of Jews in Mexico. Representatives of the Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Arab cultural groups, as well as Jews from Chihuahua, Guadalajara, Torreón, Veracruz, and Mazatlán participated in the organization.²⁴ The meeting can

²³ "A Jewish Festival," from The Mexican Herald, reprinted in AJHS, XIV (1906), pp. 212-213.

²⁴ Francisco Pedro González, Jews in Mexico," American Israelite, March 31, 1921.

be interpreted not only as a recognition of the dangers inherent in the contemporary revolution, but as an expressed determination to survive as Jews in Mexico. Monte Sinai, permanently established in 1912, provided the organizational base from which the Jewish community continued its development.

Jews from European Turkey and in even greater numbers from the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo continued to arrive in Mexico throughout the years of the Mexican Revolution. The end of World War I, which brought the dissolution of the Turkish Empire and renewed persecution of the Jews of eastern Europe, caused a new wave of emigration from the Old World. The United States was the goal of many of these emigrants, particularly the Europeans, but restrictive immigration legislation in the United States limited the numbers who could legally enter this country. As a result, thousands of Jews from eastern Europe went to Mexico, hoping to make their way from there across the Texas border to the United States.

The vast majority of the Russian and Polish Jews who made up the postwar immigration arrived in Mexico practically penniless. Although some of them did successfully smuggle themselves into the United States (there is no possible way to know how many succeeded), most of them found themselves, unskilled, jobless, and penniless in Mexico - a Jewish proletariat with almost no chance of employment. In 1921 when the Russian Jews began to arrive in significant

numbers, Mexico was barely beginning its recovery from the violent years of revolution. The index of the value of production in Mexico indicates that between 1910 and 1921 the production value had actually fallen, and wages were lower than they had been in 1910.²⁵

As a result the European Jews became peddlers, often getting their first stock in trade on consignment from an established Jewish merchant. Although the established Jews in Mexico organized to help the immigrants, their aid was inadequate, and the B'nai B'rith organization of the United States provided much needed facilities and funds. In 1925, in spite of these efforts, the situation of the Jews was described by a Mexican newspaper as "positivamente dolorosa."²⁶ Under these circumstances the success of the immigrants is quite remarkable. Although Mexico did not offer jobs, Mexico did offer opportunity for energetic and resourceful newcomers. Mexico needed industry in which her newly organized workers could find employment. Presidents Obregón and Calles, therefore, publicly welcomed Jewish immigrants who would become Mexican citizens, invest in the Mexican economy, and employ Mexicans on the terms dictated by the powerful labor organization, CROM (Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana). The

²⁵ Manuel Germán Parrá, "Evolución histórica de la industria de transformación en México," Table 16 in La industrialización de México (México: Imprenta Universitario, 1954). Also Víctor Alba, The Mexicans: The Making of a Nation (New York: Pegasus, 1967), p. 146.

²⁶ New York World, August 6, 1925 citing a Mexico City paper of August 4.

presidents did not have peddlers in mind, but the Russians did not remain peddlers long. Most of them gradually advanced to a stall in the marketplace and eventually to shops or small factories in the towns and cities of Mexico. Although the Jewish artisan did not find employment in Mexican industry, if he had a skill he was able to establish a service business of his own. Jewish immigrants opened shoemaking and blacksmith shops, established themselves as butchers, bakers, tailors, and carpenters. Others, when they accumulated a little money, began to develop new industries in Mexico; some manufactured clothing, others shoes, and still others, furniture. There was not a field that was not wide open for investment and hard work.²⁷ The improved general economy from 1924 to 1929 contributed to the success of the Jewish immigrants, and by the time the depression began in late 1929, the peddler was no longer the predominant Jew in Mexico.

For the Jews in Mexico, the 1920's were years of immigration, Mexicanization, and establishing some measure of economic security. Although schools and cultural groups were organized, there was little religious activity among the eastern European Jews. By 1930, however, when there were approximately 20,000 Jews in Mexico, the Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Damascus, and Aleppo Jews had divided into separate communities which they maintain to this day. By 1930 each group had established its own schools and clubs, and each had at least one synagogue.

²⁷ Brenner, p. 337.

Depression brought anti-Jewish statements from Mexican as well as from the Spanish, German, and French merchants, and a law which had been passed in 1926 authorizing the president to deny admittance to would-be immigrants not "economically beneficial to the nation" was used to limit the 1929 immigration almost exclusively to the families of men already established in Mexico. Anti-semitism was first overtly manifested when Jewish merchants were expelled from the Langunilla market in Mexico City in 1931. The early manifestations of anti-semitism were strictly economic in nature, and the victims were small shopkeepers. As the 1930's progressed, however, Nazi propaganda added to the anti-Jewish sentiment and the movement became more vicious as organizations were formed and pamphlets published warning of "the Jewish menace."²⁸

As in 1912 when adversity had brought the Jews of Mexico together, once again the members of the separate communities joined forces to combat the anti-semitic movement. A Jewish Central Committee was organized with an active Anti-defamation Department which effectively initiated public relations activities, made contributions toward projects for the benefit of the nation, and published literature to counteract the propaganda emanating from Germany.

The Jews who came to Mexico in the 1920's probably did not realize that they were making their homes in a nation

28

Solomon Kahan, "The Jewish Community in Mexico," Contemporary Jewish Record, II (New York, June 1940), 257. One example is "El peligro judío," Opúsculo 125 in Fondo de Hilario Medina. (México: 1944).

that was in the midst of a social revolution, nationalistic and xenophobic in nature. The immigrant aid committees, the B'nai B'rith, and the Y.M.H.A. were aware of the Mexicanization program directed by Manuel Gamio as an essential part of making Mexico a unified nation. The Jewish committees established in Mexico believed that Mexicanization was essential to the successful adjustment of the immigrants and cooperated with the program by sponsoring Spanish courses and lectures on Mexican laws and customs.²⁹ As a result, the immigrants who arrived from Europe in the 1920's did to a great extent "Mexicanize" within a very few years. Welcomed to the country by Presidents Obregón and Calles, the immigrants adjusted rapidly; most of them sent their children to Mexican schools, and in their first years in Mexico, although Jewish schools and cultural clubs were established, their interest in formal religion and in organized Jewish life was minor.³⁰ The anti-semitic movement of the 1930's, however, brought the Jews together and caused them to withdraw as a community from general Mexican society. The Jews organized themselves into separate communities and proceeded to live as separate foreign groups in Mexico.

The children who were born to the immigrants of the 1920's were raised as Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Arab Jews, and actually identified less as Mexicans than did their

²⁹ Maurice Hexter, "The Jews in Mexico," Jewish Social Service Quarterly, II (New York, 1926), 276.

³⁰ Brenner, pp. 338-341.

parents. This can be attributed directly to the xenophobic milieu of the 1930's, the decade when today's adult generation was born.

The transition in the 1940's when Mexican industry began its rapid development and a real rise in the Mexican standard of living was realized, brought a new Mexican self-confidence, and consequently less need for defensive xenophobia. Mexican Jewish writers have reported that after 1939 there was a complete change in public attitude toward the Jews in Mexico. The 1947 immigration law was much more liberal than that passed in the 1930's; the majority of the Jewish immigrants were granted Mexican citizenship, and since 1939 there has been virtually no discrimination against the Jew in Mexico.

In this modern Mexican society the generation now reaching maturity is beginning to reject the separatist teachings of their parents. They identify as Jews, and will probably continue to do so in this generation, but they also identify as Mexicans.

The Jewish community of Mexico has come a long way since the day in 1889 when Francisco Rivas and his friends held their simple service and applauded the reading of a Psalm of David. Imagine the reaction of this dedicated advocate of Jewish life were he to see the thousands of members of the modern Jewish community thronging the synagogues of Mexico City to celebrate the annual Holy Days.

APPENDIX

On December 22, 1936 William Mayer of Mexico City, formerly of Orizaba, wrote the following letter to Dr. Martin Zielonka. The letter is reproduced here as the frank expression of the views of one Jewish man who lived in Mexico as an Englishman rather than a Mexican and rather than specifically as a Jew. Yet he has been deeply affected by the immigration of thousands of eastern European Jews to Mexico, a country where Jews lived earlier in insignificant numbers. He set forth his experiences and his opinions. William Mayer is not the typical Jew in Mexico; there is no typical Jew. His letter does, however, summarize many of the conclusions of this paper, and offers what he considers a plan to preserve Judaism in Mexico. The original letter is in the files of the Zielonka collection in the American Jewish Archives.

December 22, 1936

Rabbi Martin Zielonka
Temple Mt. Sinai
El Paso, Texas

Dear Friend,

You will doubtless be surprised to receive a letter from me after we have not seen each other or corresponded for so many years, but knowing you to be so greatly interested in everything concerning judaism in Mexico, you having been one of the pioneers in arranging for the immigration of so many of our people to this country, and knowing also that there are many who would like you to pay another visit to Mexico, I have thought that perhaps you would like to hear the views of one who has not otherwise taken any active part in jewish questions, and can, for that reason, look at matters from a fresh and impartial standpoint.

But before entering the subject I think I should give you a few data about myself as we have not had many contacts and, of course, my opinions are no doubt colored by my past experiences. I was born and educated in England, my parents having migrated there from South Germany, and brought me to Mexico when I was quite young. We were not what is called a religious family, and I have only a very faint recollection of the sufficient Hebrew I learned to be able to pass my Bar Mitzvah. In Orizaba we were for over thirty years the only jewish family. Our social

relations were with the British, French, Germans, and other foreigners living there, and to some extent with the Mexicans. We did not assert our judaism, but on the other hand never denied it, and in all probability the majority of people with whom we came in contact, merely observed that we did not attend Mass, did not recognize us as jews, but lumped us together with the other foreigners. During these years we had some jewish acquaintances in Mexico City, and when I was in El Paso for several months in 1916/17, I was happy to associate with some of our own people. At that time I attended some of your services and was fortunate to meet my wife who was a member of your congregation. From a national standpoint I have always considered myself an Englishman first, and was for several years British Vice Consul at Orizaba. Next in importance I considered it my duty to take an active interest in Mexican affairs, although I have never thought to change my nationality. I was President of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce, and founder of the Orizaba Rotary Club and active in other local societies.

I am free to confess that judaism was with me an incidental matter, I might say an accident of birth, very interesting of course, but a fact that never touched me very closely. Three years ago, after moving to Mexico City, through my old friend, Dr. Sidney Ulfelder, I became a member of the local B'nai B'rith lodge, in which I have just been reelected Treasurer. Through this

circumstance there has arisen in me a feeling of kinship and sympathy with all jews, that I would not have before thought possible. I have no doubt that the suffering of the jews in Hitler Germany during the last few years, whence a number of my relatives have been forced to emigrate, or rather flee, have helped to draw me closer to our people. After this rather long preface, I will enter into the discussion of what is intended to be the subject of this letter.

As no one better than you has a right to know, up to twenty years ago the number of jews in Mexico was quite limited. A few families of Spanish jews, some of whom never disclosed their origin, or may have forgotten it, and some few dozen middle class professional and business men, and their families who came to this country from Europe and the United States to seek a better living, in which they usually succeeded, made up the jewish colony. Since the war, many thousand jews of the poorer classes have come to Mexico, some assisted by various organizations, and a great number who followed their families or friends, after hearing of the possibilities here. It is remarkable to observe how these people, generally from Poland, Russia, or Lithuania, starting out as peddlers with a small stock in trade in pen knives, neck-ties, etc., and with no knowledge of the language of the country, or its customs, after a few months or years, by constant hard work, saving, and endless sacrifice, are able to establish

themselves with a larger stock in trade in some doorway or market place, and not long afterwards open a small store, which gradually expands into a respectable business. Quite a number of immigrants, from these beginnings, have, in less than fifteen years developed large retail or wholesale business establishments, or factories. I believe that this movement is not yet generally recognized here, but within a block of my own office, which is on one of the principal business streets, there are not less than twenty jewish owned establishments, hardware, gents furnishings, cardboard box makers, opticians, bakery, millinery, leather goods, grocery, shoe store and wholesale commission agents, and in other parts of the city it is the same. In spite of the strict immigration laws, and occasional complaints in the press, these people are constantly bringing in their relatives and friends, so that the jewish colony is constantly on the increase.

There is of course some agitation against this immigration, by means of a certain type of yellow press and by handbills and posters, but ninety per cent of it emanates from the German Legation and Nazi headquarters for the purpose of stirring up anti-semitism, the jews being lumped together with the communists. The Mexican authorities may be considered at the present time neutral, if not sympathetic, towards the jews, because owing to the present socialistic, not entirely communistic tendencies

of the political party in power, they are naturally opposed to the German and Italian type of dictatorial Government, so that anti-semitism, which is a tool of the latter, has not yet taken hold in Mexico. The more important Mexican press is receptive to anything favorable to German interests, no doubt for a monetary consideration, and declines to print any news favorable to the jews. In my opinion, however, the position of the Mexican government in this matter has not yet crystalized, social questions are in a state of flux, politicians are, here as elsewhere, opportunists, and it behooves the jews, and all their directing agencies, to move rather carefully in Mexico during the next few years, to retain if not the sympathy, at least to avoid the open antagonism of the government towards our people. This has been realized here, and a small step in the right direction was the taking part of the Macabi in a recent display organized by all the sports organizations, and the Mexican Government, in celebration of the anniversary of the Mexican revolution, towards which B'nai B'rith and other jewish societies contributed financially, a large donation by jewish organizations is being considered in favor of the Mexican Red Cross, and the construction of a hospital is also, as you know, being planned. It is intended to demonstrate that the jews in Mexico take a constructive interest in this country of their adoption, and its welfare, thereby fighting, in an effective way,

the wave of anti-semitism which, in the natural course of events, is bound to increase.

There is one aspect of the jewish question in Mexico which, I believe, is not fully realized, and which should, perhaps, be deeply considered. I refer to the fact that in liberal country where the jews are not openly oppressed, there is a tendency for the younger element to merge with the people among whom they live, and eventually to lose their religious and social ties. The danger is particularly great in Mexico, where it is the government educational policy to loosen all religious ties, owing to the former political power of the Catholic Church, and where, on the other hand, the term "jew" is, in the spanish language a term of reproach or scorn. As jewish children are educated in the native schools and gradually lose the use of their parents' languages (Yiddish, Russian, Polish) etc., and as, in any case, many of the Sepharadim already speak spanish when they come to this country, it is natural that an increasing number will inter-marry with the natives with whom they have grown up. Where this form of assimilation takes place, for instance, in the United States, it must be remembered that such individuals, while lost to the jewish community, at least enter into a society that has a high code of ethics, a genuine spirit of patriotism, and which offers the opportunity for a fine and worthy life. In Mexico such is not the case. True patriotism may be considered as absent, as what passes as such is merely

hatred or jealousy of the foreigner, tinged by an inferiority complex. Codes of ethics may be mentioned in limited circles, but, on the whole, commercial and professional integrity are on a rather low scale. Therefore, any jews lost to our community by assimilation with the Mexicans, would not only be a loss to the community, but individually they would not be benefited. Everything should therefore be done to prevent such dispersion.

It seems to me indispensable that this problem should be studied and if possible a remedy found, by persons and associations capable of forming judgments and obtaining action through experience had elsewhere. I refer principally to organizations who have handled successfully similar problems in the United States. It must not be lost sight of that Mexico is in a manner of speaking a spear-point for the intelligent settlement of jewish questions throughout Latin America. With the exception of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, which are large enough to handle their political and social problems in their own manner, all other Latin American countries look up to Mexico as a sort of big brother which stands as a bulwark against "Anglo-Saxon" aggression, and is developing an advanced social legislation based on native requirements, which is the pride of the smaller republics. The handling of the jewish problem in Mexico, is therefore not only of local interest, but will be of unbounded influence in the more southern countries. It also seems to me there must be no delay. Thousands

of jews have settled in Mexico during the last few years, and they are still coming. Whatever is done, or left undone, during the next few years will react on the happiness or unhappiness of future generations. The new arrivals, coming from different countries, and speaking various languages, engaged principally in securing a foothold for themselves and families, to avoid poverty, are not free to look to the future more than from an individual standpoint. The few older jewish residents are often engaged in a struggle to maintain themselves under unsettled conditions. It is not to be expected that they can have much interest, apart from sentiment, for the newer arrivals, any more than the first jewish settlers in New York from the Spanish colonies welcome the German jews, not the latter the later Russian and Polish immigrants.

What is necessary is to weld together the jews in Mexico as one people, and what is required for this is leadership. In the first place I suggest that it is indispensable that one or more influential rabbis are sent here. It is necessary that they come with the prestige of accomplishment performed elsewhere. It is likewise necessary that they speak Spanish fluently. The rabbi who came last year from the U. S. was a fine leader, but his contacts were limited, unfortunately, to those who understood English. It was felt at the time that he should be invited to return permanently to Mexico, and I believe there were negotiations to that effect, but I do not know if there was a

decision; I believe, however, that it is essential that someone of equal calibre should be sent. Under the present laws of Mexico which place obstacles in the way of practising all religions, it is not so much the ritual that is of prime importance, but having some leader of influence and prestige to act as head of the jewish community, and such a person would require quite special qualities of sincerity, perseverance, magnetism, energy and diplomacy, and should, if possible, possess fluent Spanish and a knowledge of Latin America.

In the second place it is, in my opinion, necessary to weld together the diverse jewish elements here through their various associations and societies. We have at present no less than thirty jewish organizations here devoted to various religious, cultural, charitable, educational, political, social, and other activities. Owing to the fact that there is no leisured class among the jews here, all being engaged in their private pursuits for a living, most of these societies are run in a more or less haphazard manner, and from the fact that the immigrants come from so many parts, there is little cohesion among different individuals and societies, and some overlapping into their activities. Furthermore, a great number of jews belong to no society at all, and are out of touch with the community apart from their immediate friends and relatives.

It is here, I believe, that B'nai B'rith, with its

well earned prestige can find its greatest opportunity. Being above politics and local interests it should be able to strengthen the various jewish associations, make them more effective in their work, and act as a bond between them. For this purpose it will be necessary to increase the membership of the local lodge by bringing in prominent leaders from the different groups and societies, but above all we require advice and assistance from the United States. Our lodge was founded three years ago by a small group of enthusiasts and obtained its charter, but has since then been left more or less to its own devices. All the members are heavily engaged in the private affairs, and hardly meet except at the occasional lodge sittings. It must be remembered that Mexico is a large city, and our members have been chosen from many different walks of life. A further disadvantage in the working of our lodge, which shape has not been fully realized, is that the proceedings are naturally undertaken in Spanish, which to the majority is a foreign language, so that there is a certain air of artificiality in our meeting, but this cannot be avoided. Owing to our inexperience in the working of such a lodge, and to the pressures of personal affairs, a number of members who formerly attended regularly, now no longer do so. Others again, have so little knowledge of the objects of B'nai B'rith that they appear to believe that after their initiation they are fulfilling their duties by paying their dues. Consequently, and although our lodge is under

efficient leadership, out of a membership of fifty, only about fifteen can be said to take an active interest in the work, too small a number to be able to give the community the service which B'nai B'rith would desire.

For all these reasons, which I have outlined, it has been requested that a committee of prominent members of B'nai B'rith should visit Mexico, that we may receive advice and moral support for the development of our lodge and to increase its power of doing good to the community. Above all I believe it is necessary to make a careful survey of the situation in Mexico, as it affects our community, and to lay down a program of action for the future. I believe it will be found necessary to send down a permanent organizer, whether a Rabbi or layman, but someone with sufficient backing, energy and experience to weld together the various elements of the jewish community.

The views I have laid down above are entirely my own from observations made more or less from the sidelines, as other than my membership in B'nai B'rith I have no active association in other jewish movements. Furthermore, as I am afflicted with deafness, I cannot claim to any exchange of opinions on the subject with other persons. If my letter has been of interest to you I will be more than satisfied, and you may make whatever use of it you may wish. I am sure that with your great interest in Mexico and its jewish question you will be able to make valuable contribution towards the solution of the problems I have indicated,

and I am at your service for any information or other assistance I can give you.

With my kind regards and best wishes for a happy 1937, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

William Mayer

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The research for this study is based on a variety of sources in Mexico City and the United States. Writing a history of the Jews in independent Mexico is made quite difficult by the scarcity of published material on the subject. In fact, in Repertoires des articles relatifs a l'histoire et la litterature juives parus dans les periodiques de 1793 a 1898, a bibliography published in Paris in 1899 by Moise Schwab, only one entry pertains to Mexico. This was a linguistic analysis of the records left by the interpreter who accompanied Columbus published in the Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística in 1891. The author was Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, the Director of the Department of Classical Languages at the National preparatory School in Mexico City and himself a descendant of secret Jews. There is no reference to Mexican Jewry in any non-Mexican scholarly journal except for an Inquisition proceso translated by Dr. Cyrus Adler for Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, Vol. IV, (1896). In 1907 an American journalist named Victor Harris published The Jew in Modern Mexico, a sixty-four page book describing the Jewish community of Mexico as he observed it during a seven month stay in 1905. Three years later Dr. Martin Zielonka, Rabbi of the Mount Sinai Temple in El Paso, Texas, visited Mexico on behalf of the Union of American Hebrew

Congregations in order "to ascertain the condition of the Jews there." During his visit Dr. Zielonka wrote several "Letters from Mexico," which were published in the American Israelite in June and July of 1908. After 1920 Dr. Zielonka and others began to publish articles relative to the immigration of Jews from eastern Europe and the development of what is known today as "the Jewish community."

This essay utilizes these published sources as well as general histories of Mexico such as the Historia moderna de México series edited by Daniel Cosío Villegas, El Porfirismo by José C. Valadés, and the classic works in English by Ernest Gruening, Henry Bamford Parkes, and Howard Cline. For Mexican government policy and for demographic data, official publications of the Mexican government have been consulted. These included the Informes of the Presidents, the annual Anales de la Secretaría de Fomento, the Boletines of the Fomento department, and the several books which report the results of the census of 1890, 1900, and 1910. The Censo de Residentes Extranjeros en la República de México, 1910 reports numbers of foreigners in Mexico and their country of origin. However, since no information regarding religion is included, this work is not cited. The near complete collection of official publications of the Mexican government were consulted at the Library of Congress with the cooperation of the staff of the Hispanic Institute.

The Biblioteca Hemeroteca in Mexico City is the periodical library where nineteenth and twentieth century

Mexican newspapers and periodicals were consulted. These were especially valuable for the chapter on Mexican attitudes toward Jews. The Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección del Archivo General de la Nación Mexicana was consulted with the permission of the Director, Professor Martín Quirarte. This Archive includes the "Cartas de Naturalización" which lists the name of every man who became a naturalized citizen of Mexico between 1830 and 1931. The Archivo de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México provided data on the careers of two men discussed in this essay, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver and Jesús Díaz de León. Profesora Rosa de Carreón, the Directress of the Archive also made available her private "Fondo de Inventario" which includes a complete record of the work of Dr. Díaz de León. The private archive of Dra. Marianne Oeste de Bopp provided valuable leads to material on Isidoro Epstein and other German Jews in Mexico. Dra. Bopp, the Chairman of the Department of German Studies at the National University, has compiled a detailed file of some 40,000 entries pertaining to Germans in Mexico and German - Mexican affairs. Dra. Bopp wishes scholars in the United States to know that her valuable archive is available for their use.

In the Biblioteca Nacional and the Biblioteca of the Universidad Nacional there are several books on Jewish subjects written by Mexican Jews, but no study of Jewish people in Mexico. The most helpful books consulted in Mexico were the guides and directories to Mexico City, in

particular the Guía General Descriptiva de la República Mexicana by J. Figueroa Domenech (Barcelona, 1899).

There is more specific information about Jews in nineteenth and early twentieth century Mexico available in the United States than in Mexico, especially to the researcher without extensive personal contacts. The American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio is a treasure house of material for investigators of American Jewish history from the colonial to the modern period. From records and memoirs of American Jews who served in the Mexican War a bit of the history of Jews in Mexico in 1848 has been pieced together. The materials collected over a thirty year period by Dr. Martin Zielonka provide much information and many valuable documents including the letter from William Mayer, the Appendix to this study and also letters from Francisco Rivas. After Dr. Zielonka's death in 1938, his son, Dr. David Zielonka presented all of the late rabbi's papers, correspondence, and reports to the Archives. From his first trip to Mexico City in 1908, Dr. Martin Zielonka pursued his interest in the Jews of Mexico and in learning more about them. He was fascinated by Francisco Rivas, the marrano language professor, and secured from Professor Rivas copies of most issues of the Jewish periodical Rivas published in 1889. Dr. Zielonka gave these to the American Jewish Historical Society which holds the originals, while the American Jewish Archives has microfilm copies in its files.

Also in the American Jewish Archives are the papers of Jacob Schiff, which have been cited in this study with the permission of the Director of the Archives, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus. The collection of papers, reports, and correspondence in the B'nai B'rith files of the Archive will be of invaluable help to the investigator of the modern Jewish community in Mexico.

The Periodical Library of Hebrew Union College and Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati contains an extensive collection of Jewish periodicals of historical interest published in Germany, England, and France as well as the United States. Two of the nineteenth century periodicals, Occident, published in Chicago from 1843 to 1868 and Die Deborah, published in Cincinnati from 1855 to 1903 are completely indexed, and indexing is in process for the American Israelite. A guide to nineteenth century references to Mexico in Jewish periodicals was compiled by the late Dr. Gotthard Deutch, who served as a visiting rabbi in Mexico in 1908. At that time Dr. Deutch did some research on Mexican Jewry, and his bibliography at the American Jewish Archives proved most helpful to this researcher.

Information on the modern community in Mexico is based almost entirely on published sources. Articles by Maurice B. Hexter, Solomon Kahan, Seymour B. Liebman, Tovy Meisel, Melech Ravitch, and Eduardo Weinfeld have provided general background as well as specific information. Letters from Mr. Liebman as well as from Morris Riskind and from

Sr. Chaim Lazdeiski, the Executive Secretary of the Comité Central Israelita de México provided additional data.

In addition to these sources, an interview with Señor Rubén Mazal, a charming and intelligent Sephardic gentleman who immigrated to Mexico with his bride in 1909 enlivened and confirmed the written evidence of a small but active Jewish community in Porfirian Mexico.

The research for this study is limited by the author's reliance on sources found in Mexico City and in eastern United States. The library of the University of Texas at Austin, and the state archives of Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico might well provide additional information. Another potential source of material is France. In the Archives Diplomatiques are several volumes which contain information about proposed colonies of Jews in Mexico. The Archives are cited by Moisés González Navarro in his study, La Colonización en México: 1877 a 1910. It is likely also that the Alliance Universelle Israelita and other organizations have material pertaining to French Jews in Mexico.

It is hoped that this study, limited to the sources cited below, serves to further an understanding of the history of the Jewish people in independent Mexico.

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Abbreviations:

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AJYB American Jewish Year Book.
 CCYB Central Conference of American Rabbis Year Book.
 HAHR Hispanic American Historical Review.
 JPS Jewish Publication Society of America.
 UNAM Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

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